

MARCH

25¢

STRANGE ADVENTURES ON OTHER WORLDS—

PLANET stories

A.N.C.

TONIGHT THE STARS REVOLT!

A Novel of Pirate Worlds
By GARDNER F. FOX

CAPTIVE OF THE CENTAURIANS

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to fill their harems on Alpha

POUL ANDERSON

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PLANET STORIES



VOL. 5, No. 5

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MARCH, 1952

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JACK O'SULLIVAN, Editor

MALCOLM REISS, Mgr. Editor

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THE VIZIGRAPH

There seems to be little question as to who gets the nod for November's offerings. Henry W. Burwell's hard-hitting letter simply walked away from the field. Bill Tuning was an easy second with Carl Schemmerling nosing out the other 53,000 for a dangerous third. It's a good thing this robot has a special built in photo-finish, that's all he can say!

'ELLO ALTHAZT, WAZOP?

Attention! mican trobes from althazt communicating with p-s earth. do you read me?

We on althazt have received sequenses of p-s since april(earth time) via communicator. visions on the covers were done well and we appreciate the use of short narratives.

Accept my apologies. i was inturrupted for a moment but forgot to turn the communicator off.

The space of a moment ago in the graph brought to my attention something which might be of great interest to you of earth.

one of our trobes here on althazt happens to be an amateur mental creator and has several narratives stored away in thought cavities ready to be expounded to the public. as a start in mental science creating he has expirianced in his mind a method of showing you earthmen what you might identify as —nothing—. shown in your visual records it might cover one plane.

Already he is expiriancing another narrative of an earthman who is attacked by nothing. he can also visualize in the background other plots which are soon to come to his conscious mind.

Please include this communication in your visual record of the next 1/12th cycle as we would like to influense earthmen in our favor.

If communicators are handy we would like to make contact with earthmen at troy new york western sector earth.

Please excuse the spelling. our translator, the only earthman we have been able to make dirict contact with is quite young (sixteen cycles).

Galus from althazt breaking contact.

THE NEW VP LAYS IT ON THE LINE

Ste. 11-406 Notre Dame Ave.,
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada,

Ed.,

Well seeing as now I'm Vice-President of Planet Stories I believe that we need a change of policy here. I've been noticing our sales have been dropping lately and have found out why. Our mag. is too puerile for the more mature readers of staf.

First we must get rid of our sexy covers and put on something that can compare with Galaxy or any of the other top notch mags. These sexy women attract the customer but they aren't steady readers and are disappointed after the first issue. We must get Cartier to do a cover or Bok or Finlay. One such cover and we'll have a tremendous upheaval and increased sales. Also we must get Cartier, Finlay and Bok to do some illustrations as Vestal is getting too old and his style smells.

Next we must get rid of Poul Anderson for the while. His plots are getting to be too stereo-typed and the fen are getting disgusted with it all. A story by Bradbury, Kuttner or van Vogt will perk up these lacking novels.

The shorts aren't too bad but a few name authors will help out greatly.

Now for the format. Frankly we must fix up the heading of Planet. Too immature. Also we must trim the edges of the magazine. A little extra cost, true, but it will attract more readers. Also the letter section is, to be frank, going to the dogs. Doug. Mitchell's letters are ruining our sales and unless he starts writing saner letters we will have to go broke. How can he write such lousy tripe?

Now Reiss. We come to you. Get out from under the desk. I want a word with you. Perk up a bit here and get rid of those cute secretaries. I need a few around my office. Hows about some decent editorials for a change??

Oh yes. The Nov. issue was fair. S'long.

Yours stf. anatically,

DOUGLAS MITCHELL,
Vice-Pres. Planet Stories.

Ed's note—All right, get yourself a new editor. I'm going back into the second-hand spaceship business.

★ ★ ★ RECOMMENDED

2711 La Salle St.,
Racine, Wisconsin

Dear Ed:

In the May PLANET a certain Wm. Nolan criticized the critics of Ray Bradbury, then Mary Corby leaped in to answer Nolan, latest in the fray has been Arthur Stone's epistle in the Nov. issue. I would like to be allowed to continue this chain letter series.

Arthur Stone's letter has several excellent points, particularly his arguments in favor of "art for art's sake." Most "good" art is good because it exists for its own sake and not because it has a moral or tells a pleasing story. I also agree with him when he defends Bradbury against holding a "belief in the basic rottenness of mankind." Bradbury is certainly preoccupied with death, but not to the extent Mary Corby's letter indicates.

However, the point I'd like to answer is Arthur Stone's implication that human nature cannot or is not being changed, when he says: "I can't see where we've become more intelligent, less hateful, or less susceptible to . . . mob action since . . . the

crucifixion of Christ. . . ."

Arthur, the most changeable thing in this universe is that elusive quality known as human nature. Any single semester course in history, anthropology, or psychology should convince you of that. You are not the same person you were five years ago or one year or even six months ago. You don't have the same beliefs you held six months ago, you don't think as you did then nor give the same reaction to the same stimulus as you did then. If you do, something's wrong and you should see your nearest psychiatrist (or dianeticist, if you prefer). All these constantly changing qualities make up our changing personalities and changing human natures.

When Mr. Stone says that we have not changed since the Hebrews were driven out of Egypt, I ask him to consider, as one example, the manner of treatment of conquered enemies. In the last few centuries this degradation has undergone an almost complete reversal. As close as 200 years ago it was commonplace and expected that a conquered country would be subjected to looting, rape, and murder; indeed, this was part of the soldiers' pay. In those days a conquered nation was scraped dry of everything of value. Contrast this with the modern method of spending millions of dollars to rehabilitate and re-educate the oppressed.

In the introduction to his novel CUTLASS EMPIRE F. Van Wyck Mason says: "Not even a student well steeped in [historical] research can stomach happily the true extent of a seventeenth-century conqueror's savage oppression of his defeated enemies, the prevalence of gross tastes and customs, and the insensate intolerance of one religious faction toward another. Obviously, people as a whole, together with their customs and religious views, have changed immeasurably during the interval between 1649 and 1949—and for the better." And probably historians of a few hundred years from now will look upon us in the same manner.

That we have become "more intelligent and less hateful" is perhaps most clearly mirrored in our religion, which has also changed considerably since the "good old days." The concept of God has in most religions evolved from that of an entity powerful and awful in his vengeance to a being "serene and merciful in his wisdom" (H. Overstreet, *The Mature Mind*).

Of course we still have racial intolerance and ideological fanaticism and some mob action. No matter how close our culture approaches to maturity there will still be some men like Hitler and Stalin, and on an infinitesimal scale, Sigler and Lanoue, who thru ignorance and prejudice will lack the maturity and the courage to rise above the unfortunate bigoted conditioning of their environment, but thank heaven their number grows smaller every year. Of course our culture is not perfect! Perfection is like the limit of the sum of a convergent series: we can approach it but never reach it. Right now human nature is far from it, but we are approaching it. Slowly, year by year and generation by generation, humanity is coming nearer to that ultimate maturity that we crave.

But from the trivial leave us turn to the trifling: PLANET STORIES was fair this issue but below its usual standard. Best story: THE LAST LAUGH by Bryce Walton and best illustration for same. Best letters: Dick Ryan, H. W. Burwell, Doug Mitchell.

Shall we all just ignore Lionel Meltzer?

In closing I would like to dedicate a parting shot to the above-mentioned Sigler, Lanoue, et company.

(Continued on page 86)

Captive of the Centaurianess

A Novel of Primitive Future Worlds

By POUL ANDERSON





The entire System was after Ballantyne. Earth wanted him. The Jovian war-fleet jettied on his trail. But mainly Ballantyne feared his big-bosomed, sword-swinging space-mate—Dyann the Amazon from man-starved Alpha C3.

THE hero is the child of his times, in that his milieu furnishes him with motives and means, and yet the hero seizes the time and shapes it as he will. And he remains an enigma to his contemporaries and to the future.

Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the strange story of the three whose discoveries and achievements determined the whole course of history. The driving idealism and bold military genius of Dyann

Korlas; the mighty wisdom, profound and benign, of Urushkidan; above all, perhaps, the transcendent clarity of mind and inspired leadership of Ballantyne—these molded our century and all centuries to come, and yet we will never understand them, they are too far beyond us and their essential selves must be forever a mystery.

—Vallabhbhai Rasmussen, *History of the Twenty-third Century*, v. 1

I

THE tender loomed above the crowd of passengers and leave-takers, a great shining bullet caught in floodlights against the dark, and Ray Ballantyne quickened his steps. By Heaven, he'd made it! The flight from San Francisco to Quito, the nail-biting dawdle as he waited for the airbus, then the flight out to Ecuador Spaceport, the last walk through the vast echoing hollowness of the terminal, out onto the field—and there it was, there the little darling lay, waiting to carry him from Earth up to the *Jovian Queen* and safety.

He kissed his fingers at the tender and showed rudely through the swarm of people and Martians. He'd already missed the first trip up to the liner, and the thought of waiting for the third was beyond endurance.

"Hey, chum."

As the heavy hand fell on his arm, Ballantyne whirled, his heart slamming against his teeth and his spine dropping out. The thick-set man compared his thin sharp features with the photograph in the other paw, nodded, and said "All right, Ballantyne, come along."

"*Se llama Garcia!*" gibbered the engineer. "*No hablo Inglés.*"

"I said come along," said the detective wearily. "I thought you'd try to leave Earth. This way."

Ballantyne's free hand reached up and crammed the fellow's hat down over his eyes. Wrenching loose, he turned and ran for the gangway, upsetting a corpulent Latin woman en route and pursued by a volley of imprecations. He shoved aside the passenger before him and ran into the solid wall of an impassive Jovian ship's officer.

The Jovian, a tall muscular blond in a dazzling crispness of white uniform, looked at him with the thinly veiled contempt of a proper Confed for the lesser breeds of humanity. "Ticket and passport, please," he said stonily.

Ballantyne shoved them at him, glancing shakily back to the detective who had become entangled with the indignant woman and was being slapped with a

handbag and volubly cursed. With maddening deliberation the Jovian scanned the engineer's papers, compared them with a list in his hand, and waved him on.

The detective caromed against the same immovable barrier. "Let me by!" he gasped.

"Your ticket and passport, please," said the Jovian.

"That man is under arrest. Let me by."

"Your ticket and passport, please."

"I tell you I'm an officer of the law and I have a warrant for that man. Let me by."

"Proper authorization may be obtained at the main office," said the Jovian coldly.

The detective tried to rush, encountered a bit of expert judo, and tumbled back into the crowd. Every able-bodied Jovian was a well-trained military reservist.

"Proper authorization may be obtained at the main office," repeated the immovable barrier. To the next man, "Your ticket and passport, please."

Ray Ballantyne dashed the sweat off his brow and permitted himself a nasty chuckle. By the time the hapless detective had gone through all that red tape, the tender would be well on its way.

Before one of his country's secret police the Jovian would have quailed and said nothing. But this was Earth, and the Confeds loved to bait Terrestrials, and there was no better way than by demanding the endless papers which their file-clerk mentalities had devised.

The engineer went on into the tender, found a seat, and strapped himself in. He was clear. Before Heaven, he was away!

Even the long Vanbrugh arm did not reach to Jupiter. Ballantyne's alleged crimes weren't enough for the Earth government to ask his extradition. He could stay on Ganymede till the whole business had blown over, and then—well—

He sighed, relaxing—a medium-sized young man, slender and wiry, with close-cropped yellow hair and features a little too sharp to be handsome. His thin deft fingers rearranged his overly colorful tie and straightened his sports jacket. Always wanted to see the Jovian System, anyway, he rationalized.

The tender's airlock sighed shut and a stewardess went down the aisle hand-

ing out anti-acceleration pills. She had the full-bodied, pure-blooded good looks of the ideal Jovian together with their faintly repellent air of hard, purposeful efficiency. The rockets began to throb, warming up, and a siren hooted.

Ballantyne turned to the man beside him, obsessed with the idiotic desire for conversation found in all recent escapees from the law or the dentist. "Going home, I see," he remarked.

The man was a tall specimen in the gray Jovian army uniform, with colonel's planets on his shoulders and a chestful of ribbons and medals—about forty, closely shaven head, iron jaw, ramrod spine. He fixed the Earthling with a chill pale eye and said, "And you, I see, are leaving home. Two scintillating deductions."

"Ummm—uh—well." Ballantyne looked away, his ears ablaze. The Jovian clutched his heavy portfolio tighter to his side.

The tender shook itself, howled, and jumped into the sky. Ballantyne leaned back in the cushioned seat, staring out the port at the fire-starred unfolding of space. The Jovian colonel sat rigid as before, not deigning to yield to the pressure.

They came up to the *Jovian Queen*, where the great liner held her orbit about Earth, and Ballantyne glimpsed her long metal shape, blinding in the raw sunlight, as the tender swung in for contact. When the airlocks joined there was a steady one-gravity as the spaceship rotated on her axis. Whatever you could say against the Jovians—and that was quite a bit—they did maintain the best transport in the Solar System. Earth's heavy passenger and freight haulers were in tight financial straits competing with the state-subsidized lines of Jupiter.

An expressionless uniformed steward took charge of the passengers as they entered the ship, herding them to their respective destinations. Ballantyne lugged his valise toward third-class section. He'd have to share his cabin with two others—how had the mighty fallen! Thinking over the decline and fall of the Ballantyne pocketbook, he sighed, and the suitcase seemed to drag at him. He'd hit Ganymede pretty broke, unless . . .

He opened his assigned door.

"Put—me—down!"

Ballantyne dropped his suitcase and his jaw. Within the narrow cabin a Martian was struggling in the clutch of a six-foot armored woman.

"Put—me—down!" he spluttered. He coiled his limbs snakelike around the woman's brawny arms, and a Martian's four thick, rubbery walking-tentacles have formidable strength. She didn't seem to notice. She laughed and shook him a bit.

"I—beg your pardon—" gasped Ballantyne, backing away.

"You are forgiven," said the woman. Her voice was a husky contralto, burdened with a rippling, slurring accent he couldn't place. She shot out one Martian-encumbered arm, grabbed him by the coat, and hauled him inside. "You be the yudge, my friend. Is it not yustice that I have the lower berth?"

"It is noting of te sort!" screamed the Martian, fixing Ballantyne with round, bulging, and indignant yellow eyes. "My position, my eminence, clearly entitle me to ebery consideration, and ten tis hulking monster—"

The Earthling let his gaze travel up and down the woman's smooth-muscle form and said in an awed whisper, "I think you'd better accept the lady's generous offer. But—uh—I seem to have the wrong cabin—"

"Are you Ray Ballantyne of Earth?" asked the woman.

He pleaded guilty.

"Then you belon with us. I have looked at the passenycr lists. You may have the cot."

"Th-thanks," shivered Ballantyne, sitting down on it.

The Martian seemed to give the fight up as a bad job and allowed himself to be placed on the upper bunk. "To tink of it," he squeaked. "Tat I, te great Urushkidan of Ummunashektaru, should be man-handled by a sabage who does not know a logaritm from an exponent!"

Urushkidan. Ballantyne knew the name of the Martian mathematician, the latter-day Gauss or Einstein, and stared as if this were the first Martian he had seen in his life. Urushkidan looked like any other of his race, at least to the inexperienced eye. A great gray-skinned cupola of a body balanced four feet high on the walking tentacles, with the two slim, three-fingered

arm-tentacles writhing from either side of a wide lipless mouth set beneath that torse. Big unwinking eyes behind horn-rimmed spectacles, flat nose, elephantine ears—"Not the Urushkidan?" he gasped.

"Tere is only *one* Urushkidan," said the Martian.

THE amazon sat down on her own bunk and laughed, a Homeric shout of laughter ringing between the metal walls and shivering the furniture. "Welcome, little Earthman," she cried. "You are cute, I think I will like you. I am Dyann Korlas of Kathantuma." She grabbed his hand in a bone-cracking grip.

"One of the Centaurians," said Ballantyne feebly.

"Yes, so you call us." She opened her trunk and began unpacking. Ballantyne watched her with appreciation and some curiosity. He'd only seen the Alpha Centaurian visitors on television before now.

She looked human enough externally, aside from a somewhat different convolution of the ears. Internally there were plenty of peculiarities, among them a skeletal and tissue structure considerably harder and denser than that of *Homo Solis*. Alpha Centauri III—or Varann, as its more advanced nation had decided to call it after learning from the terrestrial explorers that it was a planet—was Earth-like enough in a cool and bracing way, but it had half again the surface gravity.

Sexual differentiation also varied a bit from the Solar norm. The Centaurian men were somewhat smaller and weaker than the women. They stayed at home and did the housework while their wives conducted the business. In the warlike culture of Kathantuma and its neighbor states that meant going out, cutting the other army into hamburger, and stealing everything which wasn't bolted down.

This—Dyann Korlas—was something to write home about as far as looks went. Her size and the broadsword at her waist were intimidating, but her build was magnificent in a statuesque, tiger-lithe way. She looked young, her skin smooth, and faintly golden, a heavy mass of shining bronze hair coiled about the haughtily lifted head. Her face was close to the ideal of an ancient Hellenic

sculptor, clean straight lines, firm jaw, brilliant gray eyes under heavy brows. She wore a light cuirass over her tunic, sandals, a bat-winged helmet on her head.

"It—ah—it's strange they'd put you in the same cabin with me," said Ballantyne hesitantly.

"Oh, you are safe enough," she grinned.

He flushed, reflecting that the ladies from Centauri were in little danger from any Solar man. Very likely it was the other way around. Then he recalled that their native titles translated into things like warrior, district-ruler, chief, and so on. With their arrogant indifference to mere exploration and ethnology, the Jovians had probably assumed that Dyann Korlas was male. Well, he wasn't going to enlighten them.

He looked up to Urushkidan, who was morosely stuffing a big-bowled pipe. "Ah, I know of your work, of course," he said hesitantly. "I am—was—a nuclear engineer, so maybe I even have some appreciation of what it's about."

The Martian preened. "Doubtless you have grasped it very well," he said generously. "As well as any Earthman could, which is, of course, saying very little."

"But, if I may ask, sir, what are you doing here?"

"Oh, I have an invitation from the Jobian Academy of Science to lecture. They are commendably interested and seem to realise my fundamental importance. I will be glad to get off Earth. The air pressure, the gravity, pfui!"

"But a man, uh, Martian of your distinction—traveling third class—"

"Oh, they sent me a first-class ticket, of course. But I turned it in, bought a third class, and banked the difference." He scowled darkly at Dyann Korlas. "Tough if I must be treated so—Well." He shrugged. A Martian shrugging is quite a sight. "It is of no matter. We of Uttu—Mars as you insist on calling it—are so incomparably far advanced in the philosophic virtues of serenity, generosity, and modesty that I can accept wit equanimity."

"Oh," said Ballantyne. To the Centaurian, "And may I ask why you are going to Jupiter—ah—Miss Korlas?"

"You may call me Dyann," she said sweetly, "and I will call you Ray, so? I

vish only to see Yupiter, though I doubt it will be as glamorous as Earth." Her eyes glowed. "You live in a fable. The flyin and travelin machines, auto—automatic kitchens, television, clocks an vatches, exotic dress. Aah, it vas vorth ten years travelin just to see them."

BALLANTYNE reflected on what he knew of Alpha Centauri. Even the fantastically fast new exploratory ships took ten years to cross the interstellar gulf to its wild planets, and there had only been three expeditions so far. The third had brought back a group of curious natives who were to report to their queen what the strangers' homeland was like.

He imagined that the spacemen had had quite a time, with that score of turbulent barbarians crammed into a narrow hull though of course they'd passed almost the whole voyage in suspended animation. The visitors had spent about a year now on Earth and Luna, staring, asking endless questions, wondering what their hosts did with themselves now that the U. N. had brought the nations together and ended war. There hadn't been much trouble. Occasionally one of them would get mad and break somebody's jaw, and then there'd been the one who was invited to speak at a women's club . . . He chuckled to himself.

"Are these Yovians humans like you?" asked Dyann.

"Uh-huh," he nodded. "The moons were colonized from Earth about a hundred and twenty-five years ago. They declared their independence about sixty years past, and nobody thought it was worth the trouble to fight about it. Though maybe we should have."

"Vy that?"

"Oh well, the colonists were misfits originally, remnants of the old Eurasian militarisms. They did do heroic work in settling and developing the Jovian System, but they live under a dictatorship and make no bones about despising Earth and considering themselves the destined rulers of all the planets. Last year they grabbed the Saturnian colonies on the thinnest of pretexts, and Earth was too chicken-livered to do more than give them a reproachful look. Not that the U. N. has much of a navy these days, com-

pared to theirs."

Dyann shrugged and went on unpacking. She hung an extra sword on the wall, unshipped her armor and put it up, and slipped into a loose fur-trimmed robe. Urushkidan slithered to the floor and opened his own trunk, pulling out a score of fat books which he placed on the shelf over his bunk and expropriated the little table for his papers, pencils, and humidor.

"You know—ah—Dr. Urushkidan—" said Ballantyne uneasily, "I wish you wern't going to Jupiter."

"And why not?" asked the Martian beligerently.

"Well, doesn't your reformulation of general relativity indicate a way to build a ship which can go faster than light?"

"Among oter tings, yes," Urushkidan blew a malodorous cloud of smoke.

"Well, I don't think the Jovians are interested in science for its own sake. I think they want to get you and your knowledge so they can build such ships themselves which would be the last thing they need to take over the Solar System."

"A Martian," said Urushkidan condescendingly, "is not concerned wit te squabblings of te lower animals. Noting personal, of course."

Dyann pulled an idol from her trunk and put it on her shelf. It was a small wooden image, gaudily painted and fiercely tusked, each of its six arms holding some weapon. One, Ballantyne noticed, was a carved Terrestrial tommy gun. "Qviet, please," she said, raising one arm. "I am about to pray to Ormun the Terrible."

"Barbarian," guffawed Urushkidan.

Dyann took a pillow and stuffed it in his mouth. "Qviet, please, I said." She smiled gently and prostrated herself before the god.

After a while she got up. Urushkidan was still speechless with rage. She turned to Ballantyne and asked, "Do the ships here carry live animals? I would like to make a small sacrifice too."

II

THE bulletin board said that in the present orbital positions of the planets, the *Jovian Queen* would make her voyage at

one Earth-gravity acceleration in six days, forty-three minutes, and twelve seconds, plus or minus ten seconds. That might be pure braggadocio, though Ballantyne wouldn't have been surprised to learn that it was sober truth. He hoped the time was overestimated. His cabin mates were a little wearing on the nerves. Urushkidan filling the room with smoke, sitting up till all hours covering paper with mathematical symbols and screaming at any interruption. Dyann was nice-looking but rather overwhelming. In some ways she was reminiscent of Catherine Vanbrugh. The Engineer shuddered.

He slouched moodily into the bar and ordered a martini he could ill afford. The place was quiet, discreetly lit, not very full. His eyes fell on the stiff-laced Jovian colonel, still clutching his portfolio like grim death, but talking with unusual animation to a stunning Terrestrial redhead. It was clear that ideas about the purity of the Jovian stock—"hardened in the fire and ice of outer space, tempered and beaten into the new and dominant mankind"—had been temporarily shelved.

If I had some money, thought Ballantyne gloomily, I could detach her from him and enjoy this trip.

The bartender informed him, with some awe, that the man was Colonel Ivan Hosea Domenico Roshevsky-Feldkamp, late military attaché of Jupiter's Terrestrial embassy and an officer who had served with distinction in suppressing the Ionian revolt and in asserting Jupiter's rightful claims to Saturn. Ray was more interested in the girl's name and antecedents. Just as he'd thought, an heiress on a pleasure trip. Expensive.

A couple of genial Earthmen moved up and began talking to him. Before long they suggested a friendly game of poker.

Oh-ho! thought Ray, who knew that sort. "Sure," he said.

They played most of the time for a couple of days. Luck went back and forth but in general Ray won, and toward the end he was a couple of thousand U. N. credits to the good. He let his eyes glitter with febrile cupidity, and the sharks—there were three of them all told—almost licked their lips.

"Excuse me a minute," said Ray, pocketing his winnings. "I'll be back, and then

we'll play for real stakes."

"You bet," said the sharks. They sat back, lit anticipatory cigars, and waited.

And waited.

And waited.

Ray found the redhead remarkably easy to pry from the colonel.

The girl thought it would be just too much fun to go slumming and have the captain's dinner with him in the third-class saloon. He led her down the thrumming corridor, thinking wistfully that before he knew it he'd be in Ganymede City and as broke as he'd been to start with.

Urushkidan crawled slowly by, waving an idle tentacle at him. The Martian walking system was awkward under Earth gravity and, their table manners being worse than atrocious, they ate in a separate section. It was Dyann who really started the trouble. She strode up behind Ray and clapped a heavy hand on his shoulder.

"Vere have you been?" she asked reproachfully. "You have not been in our cabin for two days and nights now."

The redhead blushed.

"Oh hullo, Dyann," said Ray, annoyed. "I'll see you later."

"Of course you vill." She smiled. "Ah, you dashin' glamorous Earthmen, you make me feel so small and weak." She topped him by a good two inches.

They came into the doorway of the saloon and three familiar figures barred Ray's passage.

"What the hell became of you, Ballantyne?" demanded one. His geniality was quite gone. "You was going to play some more with us."

"I forgot," said Ray huskily. The three men looked bigger than they had, somehow.

"It's not sporting to quit when you're so far ahead," said another.

"Yeah," said a third. "You ought at least to give us our money back."

"I haven't got it," said Ray.

"Look, pal, things happen to people that ain't good sports. They ain't very popular, and things happen to them. Where's that money?"

They crowded in, hemming him against the wall. Beyond them, he could see Colonel Roshevsky-Feldkamp staring coldly at the tableau. Ray wondered if he hadn't put the

players up to this. They wouldn't have dared start trouble without some kind of *sub rosa* official hint.

"COME on back to our cabin and we'll talk this over, pal."

The redhead squeaked and shrank aside. A meaty hand closed on Ray's arm and dragged him half off his feet. Dyann bristled, one hand clapped to her sword. "Are these men annoyin' you, Ray?" she asked.

"No, we just want a quiet little private talk with our friend," said one of them. "Just come along easy, Ballantyne."

"Dyann, I think they are annoying me," said the engineer, the words rattling in a suddenly dry and tightened throat.

"Oh, vell, in that case—" She smiled, reached out, and grabbed a collar.

There was a minor explosion. The man catapulted into the air, hit the ceiling, caromed off a wall, and bounced on the floor. Sheer reflex sent knives flying into the hands of the other two.

"Ormun is good!" shouted Dyann joyously. She gave the nearest gambler a fistful of knuckles, tossed him into the air, clutched his ankles as he came down, and whirled him against the wall.

The third was stabbing at her back. Blindly, Ray grabbed his arm and pulled him away. He snarled and lunged at the engineer, who tumbled backward clutching after the nearest weapon. It happened to be Colonel Roshevsky-Feldkamp's massive briefcase. He grabbed it free and brought it down on the gambler's head. It hit with a dull *thwack* and the fellow lurched. Ray hit him again. The briefcase burst open and papers snowed through the air. Then Dyann got the enemy from behind and proceeded to tie him in knots.

The redhead had already departed, screaming. Ray sank to one shaky knee and looked up into the colonel's livid face.

"I'm terribly sorry, sir," he gasped. "Here, let me help—"

He began stuffing papers back into the briefcase. A polished boot hit him where it would do the most good and he skidded through the disorderly mass. "You unutterable fool!" raged the voice above him.

"You would kick my friend, huh?" asked

Dyann indignantly.

A revolver clanked from the colonel's belt. "That will do," he snapped. "Consider yourself under arrest."

Dyann's broad smooth shoulders sagged a little. "I am so sorry," she said meekly. "Let me help yust a little." She stooped and picked up one of the unconscious men.

"March!" rapped the colonel.

"Yes, sir," whispered Dyann abjectly. Then, being almost next to him, she rammed her burden into his belly. He sat down with a thunderous *oof* and Dyann kicked him behind the ear.

"That vas fun," she grinned, picking up the revolver and sticking it into her belt. "Vat shall ve do now?"

"YOU," said Urushkidan acidly, "are a typical human."

Ray looked despairingly out of the brig at him. "What else could I do?" he asked wildly. "I couldn't fight a shipful of Jovians. It was all I could do to talk Dyann into surrendering."

"I mean in fighting in te first place," said Urushkidian. "I hear it started over a female. Why don't you lower animals have a regular rutting season as we do on Uttu? Ten you could spend time tinkering of something else too, someting constructive."

"Well—" Ray couldn't suppress a wry smile, "those are constructive thoughts, of a sort. But what happened to Dyann?"

"Oh, tey questioned her, found she couldn't read, and let her go. But tey won't let her see you."

"I suppose Earth would raise more of a stink over her being arrested than it's worth to the Jovians. But what's her literacy got to do with it?"

"Te colonel's papers, you idiot. Tey are bery secret. Doubtless tey are information about Eart's defenses, obtained by his spies and to be brought home by him in person."

"But I didn't read them either!"

"You saw tem. Tey are implanted in your subconscious memories and a hypnotreatment could extract tem. An illiterate like Dyann lacks te word-gestalts, she would not remember eben subconsciously, but you— Well, tat is luck. Maybe Eart can sabe you."

"Oh, no!" Ray clutched his head. "They won't bother. They don't give a damn. I'm

wanted back there, and old Vanbrugh will be only too pleased to see me get the works."

"Banbrugh—te Nort American Councillor?"

"Uh-huh." Ray leaned gloomily against the door. "I was just a plain ordinary engineer till Uncle Hosmer left me a million credits. Damn him, I hope he fries in hell."

"A man left you money and you don't like it?" Urushkidan's eyes bugged so they seemed in some danger of falling out. "Shalmuannusar, what did you do wit it?"

"I spent it. I spent damn near every millo in a year."

"On *what*?"

"Oh, wine, women, song—the usual."

Urushkidan clapped his tentacles to his eyes and groaned. "A million credits!"

"It got me into high society," went on Ray. "I made out as if I had more than I did. I met Catherine Vanbrugh—that's the Councillor's daughter—and she got ideas that I might make a good fifth husband, or would it be the sixth? Well, she wasn't a bad-looking wench, and I—uh—well—about the time my money gave out and I went into debt, she was really after me. It was somewhat urgent. I skipped, of course. Old Vanbrugh got the cops after me. I barely escaped. He's got enough influence to—well, it boils down to the fact that the Jovians can do anything to me their little hearts desire."

He strained against the bars. "Can't you do anything, sir? Your fame is so illustrious. Can't you slip the word to somebody?"

The Martian puffed out his chest above his eyes and simpered. Then he said with mild regret, "No, I cannot entangle myself in te empirical. My domain is te beauty and purity of matematics alone. I adbise you to accept your fate wit philosophy. Perhaps I can lend you Ekbannutil's *Treatise on te Unimportance of Temporal Sorrows*. It has many consoling thoughts."

He waved affably and waddled off. Ray sank to the bunk.

Presently a squad of soldiers arrived to escort him to the tender which would take him down to Ganymede. Colonel Roshevsky-Feldkamp was there, as stiff as ever, though the bandage behind his ear set his cap somewhat askew.

"Where am I going?" asked Ray.

"To Camp Muellenhoff, outside the city," said the Jovian with a hard satisfaction. "It is where we keep spies until we get ready to question and shoot them."

III

IT TOOK Dyann Korlas about two Earth-days to decide that she didn't like Ganymede.

The Jovians had been very courteous, apologized in a stiff way for the unfortunate misunderstanding aboard ship, and assigned her a brawny young sergeant as guide. Their armament was much more in evidence and much more interesting than Earth's but granting that spaceships and atomic bombs and guided missiles were more effective than swords and bows and mounted lancers, they took all the fun out of war and left nothing to plunder. She missed the brawling mirth of the war-camps of Varann among these bleak-faced and endlessly marching men in their drab uniforms.

The civilians were almost as depressingly clad, and even more orderly and obedient than those of Earth. Only the arrogant, bemedaled officer caste had any touch of dash or glamor about it. The Terrestrial concept of sexual equality had been interesting, even exciting in a way, but these Jovians had inverted the natural order of things to a repulsive extent.

She had seen the sights, and those were impressive enough—the grim rocky face of Ganymede, with mighty Jupiter eternally high in the dusky heavens; the bustling, crowded, machine-crammed underground cities, level after level of apartments, farms, factories, shops, barracks—but Earth could show more. Her guide promised to take her to the other moons of the Jovian Confederacy but she felt as bored by the thought as he seemed to be.

She got the impression that she was hurried along, from sight to sight and speech to speech, without ever a chance to talk to anyone and find out what really was dreamed and striven for on this land. To be sure, the Jovians all talked endlessly about a superior way of life and their right to return to the green vales of Earth whence their forefathers had been cruelly made to

and a small explosion of blood and teeth.

She turned back, hefting the rifle appreciatively. The Earthlings on Varann had been regrettably stingy about giving modern weapons to the natives. Assorted people, including Hamand, fled in all directions as she entered the doorway.

Down a long hall, peering into the rooms on either side, up a staircase—another sentry before a frosted-glass door gaped at her. She smiled reassuringly, moved close to him, and got her hands on his throat. Shortly thereafter she had his rifle and revolver.

Loud voices drifted through the door and Dyann, who was not at all stupid, listened with interest. One was—yes, that was Urushkidan himself, bubbling like an indignant teakettle.

"I will not, sir, do you hear me? I will not. And I demand a return passage from tis foul satellite at once!"

"Come now, Dr. Urushkidan, be reasonable." Was that the voice of Roshevsky-Feldkamp? "After all, can you complain of your treatment? You have Mars-conditioned quarters, servants, high pay, every consideration."

"I came here to lecture and complete my mathematical research. Now I find you have arranged no lectures for me and expect me to—to superbiise an—an *engineering* project! As if—as if I were a mere—*empiricist*!"

"But Dr. Urushkidan—after all, science advances by checking its theory against the facts. If with your help we create the first faster-than-light ship, it will be a triumphant confirmation of—"

"My theories need no confirmation. Tey are a developement of certain relatibity postulates, a piece of pure matematics in all its elegance and beauty. If tey agree or disagree wit te facts, tat is of no interest to any proper natibe of Uttu. Te matematics is enough, and I will habe noting to do wit applied physics. And furtermore—" The squeaky voice rose even higher—"you want only te military applications, you would habe me stoop to such bulgarity. You do not appreciate me, and I am going back to Uttu!"

"I am afraid," said the man slowly, "that that is impossible."

Dyann entered. "Are they annoyin you?" she asked.

URUSHKIDAN whirled about. The room was thick with the fumes of his pipe, and one of the two Jovians with him—a bald man in the black uniform of the secret police—was holding a handkerchief to his nose. The other one was Roshevsky-Feldkamp, who started to his feet with an oath and grabbed for his revolver.

Dyann held her own stolen gun on his midriff. "No," she said.

"What are you doing here?" gasped the officer.

"Vere is Ray Ballantyne?"

"Get out! Guards—"

Dyann took one long leap across the office, seized Roshevsky-Feldkamp by the neck and hammered his forehead against the desk. Her free hand covered the secret policeman. "Vere is Ray Ballantyne?" she repeated.

"I am glad you came," said Urushkidan. "Shall we leabe tis uncibilised place?"

Two armed soldiers appeared in the doorway. Dyann brought her gun around. The silenced weapon hissed. One of the men tumbled with a hole drilled in his forehead. She was rather proud of herself, she'd never had much chance for target practice.

There wasn't much time for self-praise, though. The other man already had his rifle up. Dyann dropped behind the desk, and the stream of slugs ripped through the wood after her. She bunched her muscles and threw the desk. There was a crash of splintering wood as it knocked down the Jovian.

The secret police officer had his gun out and trained on her. Urushkidan snaked forth a tentacle and pulled him off his feet. Dyann stopped to slug Roshevsky-Feldkamp before she got her hands about the policeman's throat.

"Vere is Ray Ballantyne?" she growled.

"Come on, come on, we habe to get out of here?" wailed the Martian.

"Vich is the vay out?"

"I'll show you—come along, quick—tis way."

Dyann frogmarched the Jovian cop toward a rear door. Booted feet were thudding up the stairs toward the office. Urushkidan

held a pistol in each hand, gingerly as if he feared they would blow up. He led the way into a hall and down a long, echoing ramp.

"Hurry, hurry," he gasped. "Shalmuan-nusar, we habe te whole Jobian Confederacy after us!"

A voice bellowed atop the ramp and a slug whanged after them. Dyann whirled and fired back, using the helplessly pinioned captive as a shield. They retreated slowly, rounding a corner and going on down a long slope to a heavy steel door.

Urushkidan opened it, slamming it frantically as they went through. They were in a hangar where several small spaceships rested on their rail-mouthed cradles. Mechanics stared at the trio.

"Quick!" snapped the Martian. "Te laboratory ships!"

The prisoner opened his mouth. Dyann laid a friendly hand on the back of his neck and squeezed a little.

"Yes, yes, the laboratory ship—practice maneuvers—hurry!" the man said.

"Aye, sir! At once!" A life time's training in blind obedience spoke there, behind the puzzled faces.

A teardrop-shaped rocket was trundled forth. Dyann looked nervously back at the door. Pursuit was most likely playing it safe, posting men outside while others went around to block all remaining exits. Once that was done they'd close in.

"I'll warm up the engine for you, sir," said one of the mechanics.

"Ve'll take it now," said Dyann.

"But you can't! You'll carbon the tubes—be likely to crash—"

"I said now." Dyann propelled her captive ahead of her through the airlock and Urushkidan crawled after. The valves clanged shut after them.

"I hope you can fly vun of these thins," said Dyann, lashing the secret policeman to a recoil chair.

"I hope so too," said Urushkidan.

Dyann stood over her prisoner. "Vere is Ray Ballantyne?" she asked. "The Earthman who vas arrested off the liner a few days ago."

"I don't know," he gasped.

Dyann drew her knife, smiling nastily.

"Camp Muellenhoff, you savage! Out-

side the city, to the north. You'll never make it. You'll kill us all."

The cradle rumbled forward to the hangar airlock. Urushkidan took the pilot chair and strapped himself in and relit his pipe with nervous boneless fingers. Dyann whistled tunelessly between her teeth. It was dark in the airlock chamber as the pumps evacuated it.

"Why bother wit tis Ballantyne?" asked the Martian. "What claim has he on us? It will need all our luck and my genius for us to escape with our own lives."

"We need his luck too, maybe," said Dyann shortly.

THE outer valve swung open and they trundled over the rails to the surface of Ganymede. Behind them, the dome covering the city rose against a background of saw-toothed mountains and dark, faintly starlit sky. A dwarfed sun lit the spaceport field with pale cold luminance. There were not many vessels in sight, no liner or freighter was in and the military ports were elsewhere. One lean black patrol ship stood not far off.

"They will be out after us soon," said Dyann. "Vat can you do about that boat there, huh?"

"We will see," said Urushkidan. He touched studs, levers, and buttons. The engines thuttered and the little vessel shook.

"Let's go!"

The rocket stood on her tail and climbed for the sky. Urushkidan brought her around, the gyros screaming at his clumsy management, and lowered her on her jets directly above the patrol ship. An atom-driven ion-blast is not good for a patrol ship.

"Now," said Dyann as they took off again, "you, my policeman friend, vill call this Camp Muellenhoff and tell them to release Ballantyne to us. If you do that, ve vill set you down somevere. If not—vell—" She tested the edge of her knife on his ear. "You may still be a police, but you vill not be very alive."

"You can't escape," said the Jovian with a certain hollow lack of conviction. "You'd better throw yourself on the Leader's mercy."

Dyann knocked a few teeth loose.

flee. But if they were going to fight why didn't they just hop in their ships and go there?

The dictator's face seemed to be framed wherever she turned, a small and puffy-eyed man in an elaborate uniform. Martin Wilder the Great. Her guide the sergeant, one Robert Hamand, said in an awed tone that she might be introduced to the dictator. He looked hurt when she yawned.

And what had become of Ray? Hamand knew nothing and seemed to care less. The secret police officer had said he would be held for a short time as a lesson and then released but surely he'd look her up if he were free. She contrasted the Earthling's liveliness with the quiet men of Varann and thought that he would be an ornament to anyone's harem even if there couldn't be issue between the two species.

On the third day, as she got up, she decided to ask counsel of Ormun. She washed, singing a cheerful song of clattering swords and sundering skulls, stowed away a breakfast that would have sufficed two humans, and walked into the sitting room of the apartment assigned her.

Hamand was waiting, very straight and correct in his uniform. "Good day," he said, bowing from the waist. "Today we will go topside again and visit the Devil's Garden. Then at eleven forty-five proceed to Robinsburg where we will lunch until thirteen hundred and then go on to—"

"I must take an omen first," said Dyann.

"I beg your pardon?"

"You need not do so, you have done no wrong." Dyann prostrated herself before the god. Then, struck with a sudden thought, gestured at Hamand. "You too."

"What?" cried the sergeant.

"You too. She might be offended if you do not pray."

"Madam," said Hamand, stiff with indignation, "I am a Jovian of the machine age, not a savage groveling before superstition."

DYANN got up, knocked him to the floor, and rubbed his nose in the carpet before Ormun. "You will please to grovel," she said urbanely. "It is good manners." She laid herself prone again, keeping one hand on the sergeant's head, and repeated

several magic formulas. Then she rose to her knees, fished three Centaurian dice from her pocketed kilt, and tossed them.

"Ah-hah," she said. "The omen says—hm, let me see now, I am not a *marya*. I think they say go to Urushkidan." She bowed deeply before Ormun. "Thank you, my lady. Now come, we go find Urushkidan."

"You can't!" gibbered Hamand. "He's doing important work. He's at the Academy—"

Dyann strolled out and he trailed futilely in her wake, still protesting. She inquired her way along the many tunnels and corridors and ramps to the Academy of Science. There were no slideways. Everyone walked. The Jovian leaders, with their concern over physical fitness, insisted that there be as much assorted exercises as possible to compensate for Ganymede's low gravity. To Dyann, weight was feathery. She bounded twenty or thirty feet at a time when the crowd thinned enough.

The Academy, a combined college and technical research institute, had a good-sized sector to itself. There was a broad open space covered with turf and the uniformed students and professors went from one to another of the doors which opened on the grass. Dyann loomed over an undersized academician who gibbered in answer to her that Dr. Urushkidan was in *that* sector and then scuttled away.

There was an armed sentry in front of the door. Seeing none elsewhere, Dyann concluded shrewdly that he was posted because of the potential military applications of Urushkidan's work. He slanted his rifle across her path. "Halt!"

"I must see the Martian," said Dyann mildly. "Please to let me by."

"No one sees him without a pass," said the guard.

Dyann shoved him aside and opened the door. He yelled and grabbed her arm. That was his big mistake.

"A man," said the Varannian reprovingly, "should have respect for women." She yanked the rifle from him and hit him in the stomach with the butt. He flew across the plaza, retching, rolled to one elbow, and snatched at his sidearm. Dyann leaped, landing on his face with a crunch of bone

"You savage!" he gasped. "You cruel, murdering—"

"I thought you Jobians were always talking about te glories of war and te rutless superman," snickered Urushkidan. "Also destiny and tings. Better call te camp as she says."

A few minutes later the ship lowered into the walled enclosure of Camp Muellenhoff. It was a dreary place, metal barracks lying harsh under the guns of the watchtowers, spacesuited prisoners clumping to work through the thin chill air of Ganymede. A detail hurried up and shoved an unarmed, suited form into the airlock.

Their leader's voice rattled over his helmet radio of the ship's telereceiver, "Major, sir, are you sure they want this man in the city now? We just got an alert to look out for a couple of escaped desperadoes."

Dyann slammed the outer valve in his face by the remote-control lever and the little ship stood on her tail again and flamed skyward.

A somewhat battered Ray Ballantyne crawled out of his suit and blinked at them. It had been a rough two or three days, though they hadn't gone very far with him. The truth drugs must have satisfied them that he was not an intentional spy, and thereafter they had simply held him until orders for his execution should come. He swayed into Dyann's arms.

"Oh, my poor Ray," she murmured. "My poor, poor little Earthlin."

"Hey, wait a minute," he began weakly.

"Just lie still, I will take care of you."

"Yeah, that's what I'm afraid of. Lemme go!"

They sat down again on a remote mountaintop, gave the policeman a spacesuit, and kicked him out of the ship. He was still wailing about barbarous and inhuman treatment. He said something too about wild beasts.

"And now," said Dyann, "let us get back to Earth before the Yovians find us."

"This crate'll never make Earth," said Ray. "I've flown 'em—let me at those controls, Urushkidan."

They heard it as well, the ominous sizzling and knocking from the engine-room shields, and felt the ship tremble with it.

"Is tat te carboning te man was talking

about?" asked the Martian innocently.

"I'm—afraid—so," Ray shook his head. "We'll have to land somewhere before the rockets quit altogether. Then it'll take a week for the radioactivity to get low enough so we can go back there and clean them out."

"And all the Yovian army, navy, police, and fire department out chasin us by now," said Dyann. Her clear brow wrinkled. "I fear that Ormun is offended because I left her amon the heathen back there. I am afraid our luck is runnin' low."

"And," said Ray bleakly, "how!"

IV

THEY used the last sputter of flame to sit down in the wildest and remotest valley they could find. Looking out the port, Ray wondered if they hadn't perhaps overdone it.

Beyond the little ship there was a stretch of seamed and gullied stone, a rough craggy waste sloping up toward the fang-peaked razorback ridge of the hills, weird flickering play of shadows between the looming boulders as the thin wind blew a veil of snow across the deep greenish-blue sky. Jupiter was an amber scimitar low on the northern horizon. They were near the south pole with a sprawling panorama of sharp stars around it fading out near the tiny sun. Snow lay heaped in drifts beyond the wind-scoured rocks, and the far green blink of glaciers reflected the pale heatless sunlight from the hills.

Snow—well, yes, thought Ray, it was snow of a sort. All the water on Ganymede was of course solid ice. So were the carbon dioxide and ammonia. But the temperature often dropped low enough to precipitate methane or nitrogen. The moon's atmosphere what there was of it, consisted mostly of argon, nitrogen, methane, and vapors of the frozen substances—not especially breathable.

The colonists used the standard green-plant air-renewal system, obtaining extra oxygen from its compounds and water from the ice-strata, and heated their dwellings from the central atomic-energy units. Ray hoped the ship's equipment was in working order.

There was native life out there, a few scrubby gray-leaved thickets, a frightened leaper bounding kangaroo-like into the hills. The biochemistry of Ganymede was a weird and wonderful thing which human scientists were still a long way from understanding, but it involved substances capable of absorbing heat energy directly and releasing it as needed. The carnivores lacked the secretions, obtaining them from their prey, and had given the colonists a lot of trouble because of their fondness for the generous supply of heat a human necessarily carried around with him.

"And now what do we do?" asked Ray.

Dyann's eyes lit with a hopeful gleam. "Hunt monsters?" she suggested.

"Bah!" Urushkidan snaked his way to the small desk bolted to the cabin floor and extracted paper and pencil from the drawers. "I shall develop an interesting aspect of unified field theory. Do not disturb me."

Ray looked around the ship. Behind the forward cabin, which held bunks and a little cooking outfit as well as the controls, there was a larger space cluttered with assorted physical apparatus. Beyond that, he supposed, were the gyros, airplant, and misbehaving engines. "Is this a laboratory boat?" he inquired.

"Yes," said the Martian. "I chose it because they are always kept ready to go out for gibing field tests to new apparatus. Get me a table of elliptic integrals, please."

"Look," said Ray, "we've got to do something. The Jovians will be combing this damned moon for us, and it's not so big that we have much chance of their not finding us before we can clean out those tubes. We've got to prepare an escape."

"How?" Urushkidan fixed him with a bespectacled stare.

"Well—uh—well—maybe get ready to flee into the hills."

"How long would we last out there?" The Martian turned back to his work and blew a cloud of smoke. "No, I will devote myself to the beauties of pure mathematics."

"But if they catch us, they'll kill us!"

"They won't kill me," said Urushkidan smugly. "I am too valuable."

"Come on, Ray," said Dyann. "Let's go monster-huntin'."

"Waaah!" The Earthman blew up, jumping with rage. In the low gravity, his leap cracked his head against the ceiling.

"Oh, my poor Ray!" Dyann folded him in a bear's embrace.

"Let me go! Damn it, I want to live if you don't!"

"Be serene," advised Urushkidan. "Look at it from the aspect of eternity. You are one of the lower animals and your life is of no importance."

"You octopus! You conceited windbag! If I needed any proof that Martians are inferior, you'd be it."

"Temper, temper!" Urushkidan wagged a flexible finger at Ray. "Be objective, my friend, and if your philosophy is so deficient that it will not prove *a priori* that Martians are always right—by definition—then consider the facts. Martians are beautiful. Martians have an old and peaceful civilization. Even physically, we are superior—we can live under Earth conditions but I dare you to go out on Mars without a spacesuit. I double-dog dare you."

"Martians," gritted Ray, "didn't come to Earth. Earthmen came to Mars."

"Certainly. We had no reason to visit Earth, but you, of course, came to Mars to admire our beauty and wisdom. Now please fetch me that table of integrals."

"There is nothing we can do to help ourselves," said Dyann, "so we might as well go huntin'. Afterward we can make love."

"Oh, no!" Ray grunted. "If I had that damn interstellar drive I'd get out of this hole so fast that—that—that—"

"Yes?" asked Dyann.

"GODS of Pluto!" whispered the man. "That's it. *That's it!*"

"Get me that table!" screamed Urushkidan.

"The drive—the faster-than-light drive—" Ray did a jig, bouncing from floor to wall to ceiling. "We've got a shipful of equipment, we've got the System's only authority on the subject, we'll build ourselves a faster-than-light engine!"

Urushkidan grumbled his way back into the lab. "I'll get it myself, ten," he muttered. "See if I care."

"The engine—the engine—Dyann, we can escape!" Ray grabbed her by the arms and tried to shake her. "We can go home!"

Her eyes filled with tears. "You vant to leave me," she accused. "You vant to get rid of me."

"No, no, no, I want to save all our lives. Come on, give me a hand, we've got some heavy stuff to move around."

Dyann shook her head, pouting. "No," she said. "You don't love me, I won't help you."

"Oh, Lord! Look, Dyann, I love you, I adore you, I worship at your feet. But give me a hand."

Dyann brightened considerably, but said only, "Prove it."

Ray kissed her. She kissed back and he yelled as his ribs began to give way.

"Yowp! Some other time, honey. I want only to save your life, don't you see?"

"Some other time," said Dyann firmly, "is not now. Come here, you."

"Stop tat noise!" yelled Urushkidan, and slammed the laboratory door.

"Ve will honeymoon on Varann," sighed Dyann happily. "You shall ride to battle at my side."

Much later the aroma of coffee drew Urushkidan back into the forward cabin. A disheveled and weary-looking Ray Ballantyne was puttering around the hotplate while Dyann sat polishing her sword and humming to herself.

"Now," said Ray, turning with what seemed like relief to the Martian, "just how does this new drive of yours work?"

"It is not a dribe and it does not work—it is a structure of pure matematics," said Urushkidan. "Anyway, te teory is beyond te comprehension of anybody but myself. Gibe me some coffee."

"But you must have an idea how it would work in practice."

"Oh, no doubt if I wanted to take te time I could debise someting. But I am engaged in debeloping a new teory of cosmic origins." Urushkidan slurped coffee into himself.

"We've got to build it and escape."

"I told you you are of neiter beauty nor importance. Why should I take time wit you?"

"But look, if the Jovians capture you they'll force you to build if for them. They have ways. And then they'll overrun Mars along with all the other planets. The only

thing that's held them back so far is the difficulty of interplanetary logistics. But when you have ships that can cross the orbit of Pluto in a matter of hours or minutes that isn't a problem any longer."

"Tat would be unfortunate, yes. But I am in te midst of a bery new and important train of thought. It would be more unfortunate if tat were lost tan if a few ephemeral Jobians conquered te System. Tey wouldn't last a tousand years, but a genius like me is born once in a million."

Dyann hefted her sword. "Do as Ray says," she advised.

"You dare not hurt me," said Urushkidan with a smug expression, "or you will neber get away."

He went over to the desk and began investigating the drawers again. "Where do tey keep teir tobacco? I cannot work witout my pipe."

"Jovians," said Ray glumly, "don't smoke. They consider it a degenerate habit."

"What?" The Martian's howl rattled the coffeepot on the hotplate. "No tobacco?"

"Only your own supply, back in Gany-mede City, and I daresay the Jovians have confiscated and destroyed it by now. That puts the nearest cigar store somewhere in the Asteroid Belt."

"Oh, no! Te new cosmology ruined by tobacco shortage. Urushkidan stood thinking a moment, then came to a sudden decision. "Tere is no help for it. If te nearest tobacco is millions of miles away we must build te faster-tan-light engine at once."

RAY made no attempt to follow the Martian's long-winded equations in detail. What he was interested in was making use of them, and he proceeded with slashing approximations that brought screams of almost physical agony from Urushkidan.

Essentially, though, he recognized that the scientist's achievement lay in making what seemed to be a final correlation of relativity and wave mechanics, something which even the Goldfarb-Olson formulas had not fully reached.

Relativity deals with solid bodies moving at definite velocities which cannot exceed that of light, but in wave mechanics the particle becomes a weird and shadowy psi

function and is only probably where it is. In the latter theory, point-to-point transitions are not velocities but shifts in the node of a complex wave. It turned out that the electronic wave velocity—which, unlike the group velocity, is not limited by the speed of light—could be imparted to matter under the right conditions, so that the most probable position of the electron went from point to point at a bewildering rate. The trick was to create the right conditions.

"A field of nuclear space-strain is set up by the circuit, and the ship, reacting against the entire mass of the universe, moves without need of rockets—right?" asked the Earthman.

"Wrong," said Urushkidan.

"Well, we'll build it anyway," said Ray. "Here, Dyann, bring that generator over this way, will you?"

"I want to go monster-huntin'," she sulked.

"Bring—it—over, you lummo!"

Dyann glared, but stooped over the massive machine and, between Ganymedeian gravity and Varannian muscles, staggered across the floor with it. Ray was checking circuits on the oscilloscope. Urushkidan sat grumbling about heat and humidity and fanning himself with his ears. The lab was a mess of tubes, condensers, rheostats, and tangled wire.

"I'm stuck," wailed Ray. "I need a resistor having so and so many ohms along with such-and-such a capacitance. Find me one, quick."

"If you would specify your units more precisely—" began Urushkidan huffily.

Ray pawed through the litter on the floor, putting one object after another into his testing circuit, glancing at the meters, and throwing it across the room. "It's vital," he said.

"Will this do, maybe?" asked Dyann innocently, holding out the ship's one and only frying pan.

"Get out!" screamed Ray.

"I go monster-huntin'," she pouted.

Absent-mindedly, Ray tested the frying pan. It was nearly right. By Luna, if he sawed off the handle—

"Hey!" yelled Urushkidan.

"I don't like the thought of eating cold beans, cold canned meat, and raw eggs any better than you," said Ray. "But damn it,

we've got to get out of here." He soldered the emasculated pan into his circuit. "Starward the course of human empire," he muttered viciously.

"Martian empire," corrected Urushkidan.

"It'll be Jovian empire if we don't clear out of here. Okay, big brain, what comes next?"

"How should I know? How can you expect me to tink in tis foul tick air, and witout tobacco?" Urushkidan turned his back. Dyann clumped in, spacesuited, sword in one hand and rifle in the other. "I saw monsters out there," she said. "I'm goin out to kill them."

"Oh, yeah, sure," muttered Ray without looking up from his slide rule. "Urushkidan, you've got to calculate the resonant psi function for me."

"Won't," said the Martian.

"By Heaven, you snake-legged bagpipe, I'm the captain here and you'll do as I say."

"Up your rectifier." Urushkidan was emptying his ash tray in search of tobacco shreds.

The airlock clanged behind Dyann. "I'll be damned," murmured Ray. "She really is going out after them."

"It is a good idea," said Urushkidan, a trifle more amiably. "Tey habe sensed te radiations of our ship and are probably coming to crack it open."

"Oh, well, if that's all—*Huh?*" Ray sprang to the nearest port and looked out.

"Gannyl dragons," he groaned. "I thought they'd been exterminated."

"Tose two don't seem to know it," said Urushkidan uneasily. "All right, I'll calculate your function for you."

THERE were two of the monsters moving toward the boat. They looked like thirty feet of long-legged alligator, but the claws and beaks had ripped metal in earlier days of colonization. Dyann lifted her rifle and fired.

A dragon screamed, thin and faint in the wispy atmosphere, and turned his head and snapped. Dyann laughed and bounded closer. Another shot and another . . .

Something hit her and the gun flew from her hand. The dragon's tail smote again and Dyann soared skyward. As she hit the

ground the two monsters leaped for her.

"Ha, Ormun!" she yelled, shaking her ringing head till the ruddy hair flew within the helmet. She crouched low and then sprang.

Up—over the fanged head—striking down with her sword as she went by. The monster whirled after her, greenish blood streaming from the cut and freezing.

Dyann backed against a looming rock, spread her feet and lifted the sword. The first dragon struck at her, mouth agape. Dyann hewed out again, the sword a leaping blaze of steel, the blow smashing home and exploding its force back into her own muscles. The dragon's head sprang from the neck. She rolled under the lashing claws and tail to get free. The headless body struck the other dragon which promptly began to fight it.

Dyann circled warily about the struggle, breathing hard. The live dragon trampled its opponent underfoot, looked around, and charged her. The ground shuddered under its galloping mass. Dyann turned and fled.

The dragon roared hollowly as she went up the long slope of the nearest hill. She saw a high crag and scrambled to its top, the dragon rampaging below her.

"Nyaaah!" She thumbed her faceplate. "Come and get me."

The monster's dim brain finally decided that the ship was bigger and easier prey. Turning, it lumbered down the hillside. Dyann launched herself into the air and landed astride its neck.

The dragon hooted and snapped after her. She climbed higher, grabbed its horn with one gauntleted hand, and hung on for her life. The steed began to run.

Hoo, bang, away over the hills with the moonscape blurring in speed. Wind shrieked thinly about Dyann's helmet. She bounced off her seat and came down again, a landslide rumbled behind her. The dragon zoomed up the ridge, leaped from a bluff, and started across the cratered plain beyond. Dyann dragged at the horn, turning its head, fighting the monster into a circular stampede. "Ha, Ormun!" she yelled. "Ha, Kathantuma!"

In an hour or so the dragon stopped and stood gasping. Dyann slid stiffly to the ground, whirled her sword over her head,

and decapitated the monster. Then she skipped home, laughing.

"Dyann!" cried Ray as she came through the airlock. "Dyann, we thought you were dead—"

"Oh, it was fun," she grinned. "Fix me a sandwich." She sat down, got up rather quickly, and opened her arms to Ray. He retreated nervously toward the lab. Urushkidan snickered and slammed the door in his face.

V

THE eighty-six hour day of Ganymede drew to a close. Jupiter was at the half now, a banded amber giant in a sky of thronging wintry stars. Ray wiped his grimy hands and sighed.

"Done," he said, looking fondly at the haywired mess filling half the lab and reaching back toward the engines. "We've done it—we've conquered the stars."

"My little Earthlin is so clever," simpered Dyann.

"I am horribly afraid," said Urushkidan, "tat tis minor achievement of mine will eclipse my true accomplishments in te popular mind. Oh, well." He shrugged. "I can always use te money."

"Umm, yeah, I never thought of that," said Ray. "I'm safe enough from Vanbrugh now—you don't arrest the man who's given Earth the Galaxy—but by gosh, there's a fortune in this little gadget too."

"For me, of course, when I have patented it," said Urushkidan.

"What?" yelled Ray. "You—"

"Certainly. I invented it, didn't I? I shall patent it too. Tell me, should I charge an exorbitant royalty or would tere be more money in mass sales at small price?"

"Look here," snarled Ray, "I happen to know how this thing is put together too."

"Do you?" grinned Urushkidan nastily.

"Uh—" Ray looked at the jungle of apparatus and gulped. He had only a few fragmentary drawings. By Einstein, he had no idea how the damned thing worked.

"But we helped you," he protested feebly.

"When you pay your mules and cows, I may consider gibing you a small percentage," said Urushkidan loftily.

"You've already got more money than you know what to do with, you bloated

capitalist. I happen to know you invested your Nobel Prize in mortgages and then foreclosed."

"And why not? When te royalties on tis engine start coming in, and I get my second Nobel Prize, maybe ten I can afford an occasional cigar. You Earthlings neber reward genius. All tese years I've had to smoke tat foul pipe— And tat reminds me, we habe to test tis machine. Where is te nearest tobacco store?"

Ray sighed and gave up. Martians had replaced Scotchmen in the lexicon of thrift, but Urushkidan set some kind of new record.

He sat down in the pilot chair and started the atomic generator on high-level conversion. "I hope it works," he muttered nervously. His fingers moved over the improvised control panel for the star drive. "Hang on, folks, here goes nothing."

"Nothin," said Dyann after a long silence, "is correct."

"Oh, lord! What's the matter now?" Ray went back to the new engine. Its circuits were alive, tubes glowed and indicators blinked, but the boat sat stolidly where it was.

"I told you not to use tose approximations," said Urushkidan.

Ray fiddled with the main-drive settings. "It's like any other gadget," he complained. "You sweat yourself dry designing it from theory, and then you have to tinker till it works."

He began changing the positions of resistors and condensers, cutting sections out of the circuit to work on them. Urushkidan shredded a piece of paper, wetted it, and tried to smoke it.

"Ray!" Dyann's voice came sharp and urgent from the forward cabin. "I saw a rocket flare."

"Oh, no!" He sprang back to her and peered into the night sky. A long trail of flame arced across it. And another, and another—

"The Jovians," he groaned. "They've found us."

"They may not see us," said Dyann hopefully.

They have metal detectors. We're done for."

"Vell, ve can only die vunce. Kiss me,

sweetheart." Dyann folded Ray in one arm while the other reached for her sword.

The patrol rockets went over the horizon, braking, and swam back. Blast-flames spattered off the valley floor and frozen-gas vapors boiled furiously up toward mighty Jupiter.

The boat telescreen blinked its indicator light. Numbly, Ray tuned it in. The lean hard face of Colonel Roshevsky-Feldkamp sprang into its frame.

"Ah, there you are," said the Jovian.

"If we surrender," said Ray, "will you give us safe conduct back to Earth?"

"Certainly not. But you may be allowed to live."

Urushkidan spoke from the lab. "Baltantyne, I tink te trouble lies in tis square-wave generator. If we doubled te voltage—"

THE first patrol ship sizzled to a landing. Roshevsky-Feldkamp leaned forward till his face seemed to project from the screen and Ray had a wild desire to punch its nose. "So you've been working on our project." He said. "Well, so much the more labor spared us."

Dyann cut loose with a short-range blaster she had located somewhere on the lab ship.

"Urushkidan will die before he surrenders to you," said Ray belligerently.

"I will do noting of te sort," said the Martian. Experimentally, he cut the square-wave generator back into the circuit and turned a dial.

The boat lifted off the ground.

"Hey, there," roared the colonel. "You can't do that!"

The Jovian soldiers who had been pouring from the grounded ship looked stupidly upward.

"Shell them!" snapped the colonel.

Ray slammed the main star drive switch clear over.

There was no feeling of acceleration. They were suddenly floating weightless and Jupiter whizzed past the forward port.

"Stop!" howled the Jovian.

The engine throbbed and sang, energy pulsing in great waves through its shuddering substance. The stars crawled eerily across the ports. "Aberration," gasped Ray.

"We're approaching the speed of light."

Space swam and blazed with a million million suns. They bunched near the forward port, thinning out toward the rear, as the ship added its fantastic velocity vector to their light-rays. A distorted pale-green globe grew rapidly before the vessel.

"Vat planet is that up ahead?" pointed Dyann.

"I think—" muttered Ray. He looked out the rearward port. "I think it was Neptune."

"Triumph!" chortled Urushkidan, rubbing his tentacles together. "My teory is confirmed. Not tat it needs confirmation, but now even an Eartman can see tat I am always right. And oh, how tey'll habe to pay!"

The colors of the stars shifted toward blue in front and red behind. Doppler effect, thought Ray wildly. He was probably seeing by radio waves and gamma rays now. How fast were they going, anyway? He should have thought to install some kind of speed gauge. Several times the velocity of light at least.

"Ha, this is fun," laughed Dyann.

"Hmmm—we better stop while we can still see the Solar System," said Ray, and cut the main drive.

The ship kept on going.

"Hey!" screamed the Earthling. "Stop! Whoa!"

"We can't stop," said Urushkidan coolly. "We're in a certain pseudobelocity-state now. Te engine merely accelerates us."

"Well, how in hell do you brake?" groaned Ray.

"I don't know. We'll habe to figure tat out. I tought you knew tis would happen."

"Now I do." Ray floated free of his chair, beating his forehead with his fists. "I hope to heaven we can do it before the food runs out."

Dyann looked at Urushkidan speculatively. "If vorst comes to vorst," she murmured, "roast Martian—"

"Let's get busy," gasped Urushkidan.

IT TOOK a week to improvise a braking system. By that time they were no longer very sure where they were.

"This is all my fault," said Dyann contritely. "If I had brought Ormun along

she would have looked after us."

"One thing that worries me," said Ray, "is the Jovians. They aren't fools, and they won't be sitting on their hands waiting for us to come back and give the star drive to Earth."

"First," said Urushkidan snappishly, "tere is te problem of finding our sun."

Ray looked out the port. The ship was braked and, in the normal space-time state of matter, was floating amidst a wilderness of unfamiliar constellations. "It shouldn't be too hard," he said thoughtfully. "Look, there are the Magellanic Clouds, I think, and we should be able to locate Rigel or some other bright star. That way we can get a fix and locate ourselves relative to Sol."

"Tere are no astronomical tables aboard ship," pointed out Urushkidan, "and I certainly don't clutter my brain wit mere numerical data."

"Vich star is Rigel?" asked Dyann.

"Why — uh — well — that one — no, it might be that one over there—or perhaps—how should I know?" growled Ray.

"We will simply habe to go back te way we came, as nearly as we can judge it," said Urushkidan.

"Maybe ve can find somevun who knows," suggested Dyann.

Ray thought of landing on a planet and asking a winged, three-headed monster, "Pardon me, do you know which way Sol is?" To which the monster would doubtless reply, "Sorry, I'm a stranger here myself." He chuckled wryly. They'd encountered a difficulty which all the brave futuristic stories about exploring the Galaxy seemed to have overlooked.

They had headed out in the ecliptic plane, very nearly on a line joining the momentary positions of Jupiter and Neptune. That didn't help much, though, in a boat never meant for interplanetary flight and thus carrying only the ephemerides of the Jovian System. Presumably they had gone in a straight line, so that one of the zodiacal constellations was at their back and should still be recognizable, but the high-velocity distortions of the outside view had precluded anyone's noticing which stars had been where.

Ray floated over to the port and looked out at the eerie magnificence of unknown

space. "If I'd been a Boy Scout," he lamented, "I might know the constellations. The thing to do is to head back toward any one which looks halfway familiar, since that must be the one which was at our stern. But I only know Orión and the Big Dipper." He looked at Urushkidan with accusing eyes. "You're the great astrophysicist. Can't you tell one star from another?"

"Certainly not," said the Martian huffily. "No astrophysicist eber looks at de stars if he can help it."

"Oh, you want a con—con—star-picture?" asked Dyann innocently.

Ray said, "I mean one we know, as we see the stars from Sol, or from Centauri. You're nice to look at, honey, but right now I can't help wishing you Varannians were a little more intellectual."

"Oh, I know the stars," said Dyann. "Every noble learns them. Let me see—" She floated around the chamber, from port to port, staring out and muttering to herself. "Oh, yes. There is Kunatha the Hunter-threatened-by-woman-devourin-monster. Not chanyed much."

"Huh?" Ray and Urushkidan pushed themselves over beside her. "By gosh," said the Earthling, "it does look like Virgo, I think, or one of 'em. Dyann, I love you to pieces."

"Let's get home quick, then," she beamed. "I want to be on a planet." During the outward flight she had been somewhat discomfited by discovering the erotic importance of gravity.

"You steer us home?" screeched Urushkidan. "How in Nebukadashatbu do you know te stars?"

"I had to learn them," she said. "Every noble on Varann has to know—vat you call it?—astroloyee. How else could ve plan our battles wisely?"

"Astrology?" screamed the Martian. "You are an—an—astrologer?"

"Vy, of course. I thought you vere too, but it seems like you Solarians are more backvard than I supposed. Shall I cast your horoscope?"

"Astrology," groaned Urushkidan. He looked ill.

"Well," said Ray helplessly, "I guess it's up to you to pilot us back, Dyann."

"Vy, sure." She jumped into the pilot seat. "Anchors aveh."

"Brought home by an astrologer," groaned Urushkidan. "Te ignominy of it all."

RAY started the new engine. They could accelerate all the way back and use the brake to stop almost instantly—it shouldn't take long. "All set," he called, and the rising note of power thrummed behind his words.

"Giddap!" yelled Dyann. She swung the ship around and slammed the main drive switch home.

Ray looked out at the weirdly distorted heavens. "There should be some way to compensate for that aberration," he murmured. "A viewplate using photocells, with the electron beam control-fields hooked into the drive circuit—sure. Simple." He floated back to the lab and began assembling scattered apparatus. In a few hours he emerged with a gadget as uncouth as the engine itself but there was a set of three tele-screens which gave clear views in three directions. Dyann smiled and pointed to one of them. "See, now Avalla—the Victorious - warrior-returnin-from-battle - vith-captive-man-slung-across-her-saddle-bow — is taking shape," she said.

"That," said Ray, "is Ursa Major. You Varannians have a fantastic imagination."

A blue-white giant of a sun flamed ahead, prominences seething millions of miles into space. Dyann's eyes sparkled and she applied a sideways vector to the star drive. "Yippee!" she howled.

"Hey!" screamed the Earthman.

They whizzed past the star, playing tag with the reaching flames while Dyann roared out a Centaurian battle chant. Ray's subconscious mind spewed forth every prayer he had even known.

"Okay, ve are past it," said Dyann.

"Don't do such things!" he said weakly.

"Darlin," said the girl, "I think we should spend our honeymoon flyin' through space like this."

The stars blurred past. The Galaxy's conquerors looked at the splendor of open space and ate cold beans out of a can.

"I think," said Dyann thoughtfully, "ve should go first to Varann."

"Alpha Centauri?" asked Urushkidan. "Nonsense. We are going back at once to Uttu and civilised society."

"Ve may need help at Sol," said the girl. "Ve have been gone—how long—about two weeks? Much could have happened in that time."

"But—but—it's not practical," objected Ray.

Dyann grinned cheerfully. "And how vill you stop me?"

"Varann—oh, well, I've always wanted to see it anyway."

The Centaurian began casting about, steering by the aspect of the sky. Before many hours, she was slanting in toward a double star with a dim red dwarf in the background. "This is it," she said. "This is it."

"Okay," answered Ray. "Now tell me how you find a planet."

"Hmmm—vell—" Dyann scratched her ruddy head.

Ray began to figure it aloud.

"The planets—let me see, now—yeah, they're in the plane of the two stars. They'd have to be. So if you go out to a point in that plane where Alpha A, your sun, seems of about the right size, and then swing in a circle of that radius, you should come pretty close to Varann. It has a good-sized moon, doesn't it, and its color is greenish-blue? Yes, we should be able to spot it."

"You are so clever," sighed Dyann.

"Hah!" sneered Urushkidan.

At a mere fraction of the velocity of light—Ray thought of the consequences of hitting a planet when going faster than light, and wished he hadn't—the spaceboat moved around Alpha A. It seemed only minutes before Dyann pointed and cried joyously, "There ve are. There is home. After many years—home!"

"I would still like to know what we are going to do when we get there," said Urushkidan.

He was not answered. Dyann and Ray were too busy bringing the vessel down into the atmosphere and across the wild surface.

"Kathantuma!" cried the girl. "There is my homeland. See, there is the mountain, old Mother Hastan. There is the city Mayta. Hold on, ve're goin down!"

VI

MAYTA was a huddle of thatch-roofed wooden buildings at the foot of a fantastically spired gray castle, sitting amid the broad fields and forests and rivers of Kathantuma with the mountains shining in the far distance. Dyann set the ship down just outside the town, stood up, and stretched her tigress body with an exultant laugh.

"Home!" she cried. "Gravity!"

"Uh—yeah." Ray tried to lift his feet. It went slowly, with some strain—half again the pull of Earth. Urushkidan groaned and wheezed his painful way to a chair and collapsed all over it.

"Let's go!" Dyann snatched up her sword, set the helmet rakishly on her bronze curls, and opened the airlock. When Ray hesitated she reached and yanked him out.

The air was cool and windy, pungent with a million scents of earth and growing things, tall clouds sailing over a high blue heaven, and even the engineer was grateful for it after the stuffiness of the boat. He looked around him. Not far off was a charming rustic cottage. It was like a scene from some forgotten idyll of Earth's old past.

"Looks good," he said.

A four-foot arrow hummed past his ear and rang like a gong on the ship's hull.

"Yowp!" Ray dove for shelter. Another arrow zipped in front of him. He whirled at a storm of contralto curses.

There were half a dozen women pouring from the charming rustic cottage, a battle-scarred older one and five tall young daughters, waving swords and axes and spears. A couple of men peered nervously from the door.

"Ha, Ormun!" yelled Dyann. She lifted her sword and dashed to meet the onslaught. The oldest woman caught the amazon's blow on a raised shield and her ax clanged off Dyann's helmet. Dyann staggered, shook her head, and struck out afresh. The others closed in, yelling and jabbing.

Dyann's sword met the nearest ax half-way and broke across. She stooped, picked the woman off her feet, and whirled her over her head. With a shout, she threw the old she-warrior into two of her nearest

daughters, and the trio went down in a roar of metal.

Centaurian hospitality, thought Ray.

A backhanded blow sent him reeling. He looked up to see a yellow-haired girl looming over him. Before he could do more than mutter she had slugged him again and thrown him over one brawny shoulder.

Hoofs clattered down the narrow dirt road. A squad of armored women riding animals reminiscent of Percherons, but horned and red of hide, were charging from the town. They swept into the fight, wielding clubbed lances with fine impartiality, and it broke up in a sullen wave of red-splashed femininity. Nobody, Ray saw from his upside-down position, had been killed, but there were plenty of slashes and the intent had certainly been there.

Th harsh barking language of Kathantuma rose on either side. Finally an understanding seemed to be reached. One of the riders pointed a mailed hand at Ray's captor and snapped an order. The girl protested, was overruled, and tossed him pettishly to the ground. He recovered consciousness in a minute or two.

Dyann picked him up, tenderly. "Poor Ray," she murmured. "Ve play too rough for you here, huh?"

"What was it all about?" he mumbled.

"Oh, these people vere mad because ve landed in their field, but the qveen's riders stopped the fight in time. It is only lawful to kill people on the regular duellin grounds, inside the city limits. 'e must have law and order, you know."

"I see," said Ray faintly.

IT WAS a large and turbulent crowd which gathered at sunset to hear Dyann speak. She and her companions were on a raised stand in the market square, together with the scarred, arrogant queen and her troop of pikewomen and cavalry. In the guttering red flare of torches, Ray looked down on a surging lake of women, the soldier-peasants of Kathantuma gathered from all the hinterland, brandishing their weapons and beating clangorous shields in lieu of applause. Here and there public entertainers circulated, thinly clad men with flowers twined into their hair and beards, strumming harps and watching with great

liquid eyes.

Ray was still not quite sure what the girl's plan was, and by now didn't much care. A combination of the dragging Varannian gravity and the potent Varannian wine made him so sleepy that he could barely focus on the milling crowd. Urushkidan slept the sleep of the just, snoring hideously.

Dyann ended her harangue and the racket of metal and voices shook the surrounding walls. After that there were long-winded arguments which sometimes degenerated into fist fights, until Ray himself dropped off to sleep.

He was shaken awake by Dyann and looked blearily around him. Dawn was streaking the horizon with cold colorless light, and the mob was slowly and noisily dispersing. He groaned as he stretched his stiffened body and tried to brush the dew off his clothes.

"The natural life—Hah!" he said miserably, and sneezed.

"It has been decided," cried the girl. She was still as fresh as the morning, her cheeks were flushed and her eyes ablaze. "They agreed at last, and now the var-vord goes over the land and envoys are bound for Almarro and Kurin to get allies. How soon can ve leave, Ray?"

"Leave?" he asked stupidly. "Leave for where?"

"Vy, for Yupiter, of course!"

"Huh?"

"You are tired, my little bird. Come vith me, and ve shall rest in the castle.

Ray groaned again.

HOW do you equip an army of barbarians still in the early Iron Age to cross four and a third light-years of space?

A preliminary question, perhaps is, Do you want to?

Ray emphatically didn't, but he had very little choice in the matter. He was soon given forcibly to understand that men kept their place and did as they were commanded.

He went to Urushkidan and poured out his sorrows. The Martian, after an abortive attempt to steal the spaceship and sneak home, had been given a room in one of the castle towers and was covering large sheets of local parchment with equations.

This place, thought Ray, has octopuses in the belfry.

"They want to go to Jupiter and fight the Jovians," he said.

"What of it?" asked Urushkidan, lighting his pipe. He had found that dried bark could be smoked. "Tey may eben succeed. Primitibes habe often overcome more advanced and better armed hosts. Read te history of Eart sometime."

"But they'll take us along."

"Oh. Oh-oh! Tat is different." The Martian rifled through his papers. "Let me see, I tink Equations 549 trough 627 indicate—yes, here we are. It is possible to project te same type of dribing beam as we use in te faster-tan-light engine so as to impart a desired belocivity bector to external objects. Toward or away from you. Or—look here, differentiation of tis equation shows it would be equally simple to break intranuclear bonds by trowing only a certain type of particle into te pseudo-condition. Te atom would ten feed on its own energy."

Ray looked at him in awe. "You," he whispered, "have just invented the tractor beam, the pressor beam, the disintegrator, and the all-purpose, all-fuel atomic motor."

"I habe? Is tere money in tem?"

Ray went to work.

The three expeditions from Sol had left a good deal of assorted supplies and equipment behind for the use of later arrivals. Most of this had been stored in a local temple, and sacrifices were made yearly to the digital computer. It took an involved theological argument to obtain the stuff—the point that Ormun had to be rescued was conceded to be a good one, but it wasn't till the high priestess suddenly disappeared that the material was forthcoming.

The Ballantyne-Urushkidan circuits were simple things, once you knew how to make them. With the help of a few tolerably skilled smiths, Ray hammered out enough of the new-type atomic generators to lift the fleet off Varann and across to Sol. He built the drive-circuits carefully, designing them to burn out after landing again on Varann. The prospect of the amazon planet's people flitting whither they pleased in the Galaxy was not one any sane man could cheerfully contemplate.

The spaceships were mere hulks of varnished and greased hardwood, equipped with airlocks and slapped together by the carpenters of Mayta in a few weeks. The crossing would be made so rapidly that heating and air plants wouldn't be needed. Once the haywired star drives were installed, a pilot sketchily trained for each vessel, and every hull crammed with a couple of hundred yelling warriors, the fleet was ready to go.

They poured in, ten times as many as the thirty ships could hold, riding and hiking from the farthest of the continent's little kingdoms to be in on the most glorious piracy of their dreams. Only Dyann cared much about Ormun, who was after all merely her personal joss, and only Ray gave a good damn about the menace of Jupiter. The rest came to fight and steal and see new countries. They were especially eager to kidnap husbands—the polyandrous system of Varann worked undue hardships on many women, and Dyann shrewdly gave preference to the unmarried in choosing her followers.

As to the practicability of the whole insane idea—Ray didn't dare think about it.

Three hectic months after his arrival at Centauri, the barbarian fleet left for Sol.

JUPITER swam enormously in the forward ports, diademed with the bitter glory of open space, growing and growing as the ship rushed closer. Ray pushed his way through the restless crowd of armed women that jammed the boat. "Dyann," he pleaded, "couldn't I at least call up Earth and find out what's happened?"

"Vy, I suppose so," she said, not taking her eyes off the swelling giant before them. "But be quick, please."

The human fiddled with the telescreen. Three months ago the notion of calling over nearly half a billion miles with that undersized thing would have been merely ridiculous. But that was another byproduct of Urushkidan's theory. You used an electron wave with unlimited velocity as a carrier beam for your radio photons. It induced a similar effect in the other transmitter. No distance diminution. No time lag. Anyway, not within the limits of anything so small as the Solar System. Ray got

the standard wavelength of the U.N. public relations office, the only one which he could call freely without going through a lot of red tape.

A blurred face looked out at him. He hadn't refined his circuits to the point of eliminating distortion, and the U.N. official resembled something seen through ten feet of rippled water—at least, his image did. But the voice was clear enough. "Who is this, please?"

"Ray Ballantyne, returning from Alpha Centauri on the first faster-than-light spaceship. Calling from the vicinity of Jupiter."

"This is no time for joking. Who the devil are you and what do you want? Please report."

"I want to give the U.N. Patrol the secret of faster-than-light travel. Stand by to record."

"Hey!" screamed Urushkidan. "I neber said I'd gibe—"

DYANN put her foot on his head and pushed him against the floor.

"Oh, well," he said. "Trough te incredible generosity of myself, ten, te secret is made freely available—"

"Ready to record?" asked Ray tightly.

"I said your humor is in very bad taste," said the official, and switched off with an ugly scowl.

Ray blinked weakly at the set for a while. Then he tuned in on Earth broadcasts until he caught a news program. Jupiter had declared war a month ago, defeated the U.N. navy in a running battle off Mars, seized bases on Luna, and was threatening atomic bombardment of Earth unless terms were met. "Oh, gosh," said Ray.

"Such an invasion could only be launched on a shoestring," said Urushkidan. "Te U.N. still has bases closer to home, it can cut Jobian supply lines—"

"And meanwhile poor old Earth is reduced to radioactive rubbish," said Ray gloomily. "And those gruntbrains in charge won't believe I've got the decisive weapon to save" them."

"Would you beliebe such a claim?"

"No, but this is different, damn it."

"Ganymede dead ahead," shouted Dyann. "Stand by for action! Get ready to make a landing."

VII

THE flagship-spaceboat slanted into the moon's atmosphere with a whoop and a holler, blazed across the ragged surface, and lowered outside the great dome of Ganymede City. The clumsy hulks behind her wallowed after at a more leisurely pace.

Lacking spacesuits, the amazons were faced with a certain problem of entry. Dyann hovered over the spaceport and opened her disintegrators full blast. The port disappeared in a sudden tornado of boiling rock and leaping blue fires. When she had sunk a fifty-foot pit, she went down into it, hung before the side of it facing the city, and narrowed the dis-beam to a drill. In moments she had cut a tunnel through to the lower levels of the city.

Air began streaming out, ghost-white with freezing water vapor, but it would take quite a few minutes for the pressure within to fall dangerously low. Meanwhile Dyann sailed blithely through her tunnel, disintegrated various walls and bulkheads to clear a landing space, and set down amid the ruins of the city's factory level.

"All out!" she cried. "Hai, Kathantuma!"

Ray buckled on his helmet with shaking fingers, drew his sword, and followed her out the airlock, more because of the press of bodies behind than from any desire for glory. In fact, he admitted to himself, he was scared witless. Only Urushkidan stayed behind—the lucky devil.

The rest of the barbarian fleet streamed in one by one, landing clumsily and discharging their clamorous hordes. When the clear area was filled, they landed on top of each other and the armored warriors jumped down in a flash of edged metal. After they were all in, Urushkidan projected a beam and melted the passageway shut against the escape of air and heat. Also, thought Ray sickly, against a quick retreat.

"Hoo, hah!" Dyann's sword shrieked in the air above the helmeted heads of her milling army. She started down the nearest corridor, running and bounding and whooping. The amazons were hard on her heels, and the racket of clashing armor and girlish voices was shattering.

Up a long staircase, five steps at a time, into the hall beyond that, spilling out over a broad plaza—

A machine gun raved and Ray saw three Centaurians tumble to the floor. As he dove for it himself, he looked across the square and into the muzzle of the thing where it sat in one of the branch corridors. There might be only a skeleton garrison left in the city but it had reacted with terrifying swiftness. Ray tried to dig through the metal floorplates.

The air was suddenly thick and whistling. A solid rain of spears and arrows loosed. It didn't leave much of the machine gun crew. One of the amazon officers—they had some notion of firearms—picked up the .50-caliber under one arm. When a squad of Jovian soldiers appeared down the hallway, she held it against her knee and used it tommy gun style. It worked.

Ray was carried along by the tide. In this weird struggle, modern firearms weren't of decisive use. Boiling through the miles of gloomy hallways and narrow apartments, the fight was almost entirely hand-to-hand, and that was exactly what the Varannians loved.

Dyann vaulted over a row of bodies and hit a Jovian squad with all her mass and momentum. She trampled two men underfoot while her sword howled in a shearing arc around her. A Jovian grenadier hurled his pineapple in her direction. She snatched it out of the air and tossed it back. Wildly, he caught it and threw it again. Dyann laughed and pitched it once more—very shortly before it went off. Turning, she skewered one Jovian, kicked another in the belly, used her sword's guard as a knuckleduster against a third, and cut down a fourth in almost the same motion. The squad broke up.

Ray saw an inviting door and scurried for it. There was a bed to hide under. Two Jovian soldiers came in at that moment, fleeing the barbarians.

Ray's helmet and cuirass were as good as a uniform, or he would have shouted "Hail, Wilder!" As it was, the nearest man lunged at him with a bayonet. Ray's sword clattered against the weapon, driving it briefly aside. The Jovian snarled and probed inward, but a bayonet is clumsy com-

pared to a well-handled blade and Ray had done a little fencing. He beat the assault back and thrust under the fellow's guard.

The other man had been circling, trying to get in on the fun. Now he charged. Ray whirled to meet him and tripped on his scabbard. He clanged to the floor and the rushing Jovian tripped on him. Ray got on the man's back, pulled off his helmet, and beat his head against the floor.

Rising, he checked the two rifles. Empty—the Jovians must have used all their clips in an attempt to stem the Centaurian thrust, which explained their choice of cold steel against him. But they had full cartridge belts. Ray reloaded one of the guns and felt better.

Peering carefully out the door, he saw that the fight had moved somewhere else. He started back toward the ships, the safest place he could think of.

AS HE rounded a corner a tommy-gun blast nearly took his head off. "He yelled, dropped to the floor just in time, and let the gun fall from his hands.

A hard boot slammed against his ribs. "Get up!"

He lurched to his feet and stared into the faces of a Jovian detachment, the black-clad elite guard of the dictator himself. Martin Wilder the Great huddled in their midst. Colonel Roshevsky-Feldkamp was at their head, in charge of Jupiter's home defense, Ray thought wildly, and tried to stretch his arms higher.

"Ballantyne!" The Jovian officer glared at him for a long moment. "So you are responsible."

"I had nothing to do with it, so help me I didn't," protested Ray between the clattering of his teeth.

"You brought these savages in, you and your damned faster-than-light engine. If it weren't for your hostage value, I'd shoot you now. As it is, I'll wait till later. March!"

They went carefully down the glutton hall-street. The Centaurians had been picking up souvenirs from every shop and apartment they passed. "Don't think this will accomplish anything," said Wilder pompously. "You may have driven us from our capital, but we have already called for

help from the other cities—from the whole Jovian System. The fleet is on its way."

So the amazons had taken Ganymede City. And now they'd be too busy looting to think about counterattacks from outside. Ray groaned.

"We have to get out of here, sir," said Roshevsky-Feldkamp. "We don't want you to be caught in the fighting."

"No, no, that would never do," said Wilder quickly.

"There is a military airlock this way, with spacesuits. We can get out on the surface."

"I will strike a new medal," chattered the dictator. "The Defense of the Homeland Medal."

"And afterward we will take those ships." Roshevsky-Feldkamp's hard face lit with a terrible glee. "And then the stars are ours."

"Hoo-ah!"

The shout rang down the hallway. Ray saw a Centaurian band, staggering under armloads of assorted plunder, emerge from a side passage. The Jovians brought their rifles up.

Something like an atomic bomb hit the group from the rear. Dyann's war-cry shrieked above the sudden din. She hadn't been altogether a fool.

Ray was shoved back against the wall by the sudden whirlpool of struggling bodies. He ducked as a Varannian sword whistled overhead. Dyann was wading in among the Jovians, kicking, striking, hewing like a maniac. She split one enemy apart, pitched another into a third, turned around and chopped loose. Her warriors got to work at her side.

A panting Jovian backed up close to Ray, lifting his rifle anew to shoot down the bronze-haired girl. The Earthmen thoughtfully removed the soldier's pistol from its holster and shot him.

"My little hero!" cried Dyann happily. "I love you so much!" She beat down another man's gun and broke his head.

The fight ended. Most of the Jovians had simply been knocked galley-west and submitted in a stunned way to being bound and hoisted to Varannian shoulders. Ray had a glimpse of Martin Wilder the Great and Colonel Roshevsky-Feldkamp being dragged off by a squat and muscular amazon

with a silly smirk on her sword-scarred face. They were destined for her harem, and he couldn't think of two people he'd rather have it happen to.

Only there were those Jovian ships—

Ray had no way, just then, of knowing that Urushkidan had prudently taken the spaceboat outside again and was using its long-range beams to disintegrate the fleet as it came down. He hummed an old Martian work song to himself as he did. There are times when even a philosopher must take measures.

OFFICIAL banquets are notoriously dull affairs, and the present celebration was no different. That the Luna-based invaders had capitulated on hearing of the disaster at home, that a democratic government with U.N. membership had been set up for a permanently disarmed Jupiter, and that the stars were open to mankind, seemed to call forth only bigger and better platitudes.

Ray Ballantyne, drowsy with food and cocktails, nearly snowblind with white tablecloth, would have fallen asleep except for the fact that his shoes pinched him. So he listened with some surprise to the president of his alma mater telling what an outstanding student he had been. As a matter of fact, he recalled, he'd damn near been expelled.

Urushkidan, crammed into a Martian-designed tuxedo, smoked a thoughtful pipe at his right and made calculations on the tablecloth. Dyann Korlas, her shining hair braided around a stolen Jovian tiara, looked stunning in a low-cut evening gown on his left. The dagger at her waist was to set a new fashion on Earth, but there had been some confusion when she insisted on having Ormun the Terrible placed in front of her and grace said to the idol. Oh, well.

"—and this dauntless genius of science, whom his university is pleased to honor with a doctorate of law—"

She leaned over and whispered in his ear—it could only be heard for three yards around—"Ray, vat vill you do now?"

"I dunno," he murmured back. "I want to get a patent on that damn interstellar drive before Urushkidan does, but after that—well—"

"It vas a lot of fun vile it lasted, vasn't

it?" Dyann's smile was wistful. "But I have been thinking, Ray. I am goin' back to Varann and carve me out a throne. You—vell, Ray, you are too fine and beautiful for such rough work. You belong here, in the glamor and bright lights, not out with a lot of coarse unruly women who might hurt you."

"You know," he said, "I think you've got something there."

"I will always remember you," she said sentimentally. "Maybe some day we are old, we can meet again and bore the

youth with talk of our great days." She looked around. "If only we could sneak out of here now and have a farewell party of our own—I know a bar—"

"Hmmm." Ray stroked his chin. "This calls for tactics. If we could sort of slump down in our chairs, as if we were tired—and Lord, I am!—and gradually sink out of sight, we could crawl under the table and through that door—"

As he crept from the hall, Ray heard Urushkidan, called on for a speech, begin the detailed exposition of his latest theory.

Her name was Mistra Beautiful.
Enchanting. And Stevens had to kill her.

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RICOCHET on MIZA

By GORDON R. DICKSON

The Warlin, that extravagantly valuable beast of Miza, was easy prey for space-scarred Bill Raush. All a hunter needed was a tough, cruel mind, for the Warlin was vulnerable to thought-kill.

IF YOU decide to go hunting the Warlin, which is an intelligent creature, it is almost necessary to know three things. First, that the female, who has the

more valuable hide, will invariably be holed up somewhere while her mate is out hunting. Second, that the male is telepathically sensitive and can be dominated by the

human mind. And third, that the Warlin is very good at playing dead.

Bill Raush, of course, knew all of these things, although he had never gone Warlin-hunting before. In various of Carlin City's dives and dens—for Warlin hunting is strictly illegal—he had listened to other hunters and made due note of the mistakes which might trip up a beginner. He had heard, and believed, that the Warlin loves its mate and will go to any lengths and risks to protect her. He had memorized the countless dodges used by the creature. And he had sworn to himself that, above all, his Warlin would not trick him into losing his mental control by playing dead.

Now he crouched in a jumble of rocks, under the starlit heavens of Miza, and waited. Below him he could see what was the equivalent of a waterhole in an earthly jungle, although the fluid in it would have poisoned a human in short order. Many creatures had already come down to drink in spite of the fact that the long Mizan night was only some three hours gone and there was another sixteen yet to go before the corrugated red sun poked above the long horizon. Unfortunately none of these had been a Warlin.

Bill shifted uncomfortably upon his rocks and cursed Miza's unfriendly atmosphere that forced him to encase himself in a rubber suit and air helmet. The process of waiting was tedious. He wanted a smoke and his back itched. And nothing could be done about these things.

So obsessed was he, in fact, with his own discomforts that he almost missed the Warlin when it did come. One second, to Bill's eyes, and it was not there. The next, and it was in plain sight, shuffling down the trail to the waterhole and looking like nothing so much as a gigantic anteater with thick, woolly fur.

Bill grinned to himself. It was a big male, half again as heavy as Bill himself, although he weighed close to a hundred kilograms. The animal was physically the match for half a dozen men. Unfortunately, as has been mentioned, it was susceptible to mental domination. It gave Bill a dark sense of pleasure to think of that mountain of muscle and bone completely at his mercy, obeying whatever commands his whim dictated.

He crouched silently, watching the Warlin approach the side of the pool, forcing his mind to lie blank and quiet like the surface of a pool of quicksand. The Warlin must not sense his presence until it was within the minimum two meters of distance. Otherwise it might be able to fight off his commands and escape.

The Warlin stopped on the edge of the pool, raised its trunk and waved it questioningly about in the darkness. Then, satisfied that the coast was clear—indeed, outside of Bill or some other human, there was little on Miza that could have harmed it—lowered its head to the waterhole.

Bill leaped!

SEIZING the boulder in front of him to gain leverage, he suddenly sent his body sailing over the edge of rocks to land feet first beside the Warlin. The shouted intention of his mind had gone before him to warn the male, who whirled. But the space beside the waterhole was too limited and the Warlin found himself within the two meter minimum distance at which Bill's mind could control him.

For a second he stood there, thick trunk upraised, half reared on his massive hind legs in the instinctive stance of battle. Then his trunk wavered and drooped, his front legs fell to earth, and he dropped at Bill's feet like a huge, shaggy dog that cringes before its master.

"Down!" Bill was shouting in his air helmet, the better to focus his mind. "Down! Down! Down!"

He could feel the mind of the Warlin recoil beneath the savage pound of his thought, and the sudden realization came to him that, emotionally, the creature could not stand it. If he kept on this way, in his eagerness to dominate, he might easily kill this male and then he would have a battle-scarred and dirt-snaggled hide to take back instead of the smooth, silky female one which would be worth a hundred times its value.

So, exultant but wary, he relaxed and the mind of the Warlin came up under the released pressure, came up like a cork through water.

"I've got you now," said Bill, tightly. "You can't get away. You can't get away."

Now, take me to your den, to your den. Do you hear me? Take me to your den."

The mind of the Warlin shifted in sudden panic. For a second Bill caught a flashing impression of a dark and guarded place where there was the warmth of another body and love and peace. Then, the impression was gone and only stubbornness remained.

"Take me," Bill was chanting inside the air helmet. "Take me. Take me to your den. Take me there. Take me there. . ."

The Warlin stood still but Bill could feel its mental opposition weakening beneath the steady forcing of his human mind. Warned by the reaction he had felt when he captured the creature, he did not insist too strongly. A dead male Warlin is of little use to a hunter. Over and over again lightly but with firm insistence, his thought beat at the male.

"Take me there. Take me there."

Suddenly the Warlin's opposition collapsed. He stood still, trembling, and Bill felt a wave of utter despair. Then the shaggy bulk turned and ambled away from the waterhole.

Bill walked close beside, one gloved hand grasping the thick fur. The night was dark, but the Warlin went surely ahead. There was no doubt that he led the way directly to his den, for his mind was opened like a box to the eyes of the human's mind and there was no deceit there.

Now that they moved in temporary cooperation, Bill was able to sense more of what the Warlin was thinking. There was a hidden level below the surface where the creature might possibly be planning something against him for it was not Bill's ability that bridged the gap between the two minds, but the Warlin's, an ability the creature could no more negate than he could stop breathing.

The Warlin was not frightened. As one of the largest creatures on Miza, fear was very nearly foreign to it. Nor, at the moment, did it hate Bill. At the moment its mind was filled with a sense of desolation, and an odd emotion that Bill did not at first understand. When he finally did, he chuckled in his air helmet.

The male had realized that Bill was out

to kill his mate. He had realized that he could do nothing to stop the Earthman and was crying deep in his alien soul—the crying of a race that had never known tears—tearing at himself with bitter reproach and pain for being the helpless instrument of his mate's imminent capture and death.

Bill chuckled and asked:

"Damn near human, aren't you?"

A flood of black hate welled up suddenly from the other mind. Partially, the Warlin had understood him—well enough, at least, so that the comparison to a human had been comprehended. So savage, so cruel, so devastating was the reaction that it stopped Bill in his tracks and he went cold with fear. It was only sheer paralysis that enabled him to keep his grasp on the Warlin's fur.

"None of that, now!" he growled, recovering. "None of your tricks." And using his mind like a bludgeon he beat the male back into temporary submission.

THEY went on through the night. Bill had resigned himself to a long walk. Warlins, he knew, hunted and drank far from their dens for the maximum amount of safety. How far they had already gone he had no way of telling but it was reasonable to assume that it was quite a ways. In fact it might take all night. It was even reasonable that they might walk like this for days and days.

Bill jerked himself savagely alert.

"Oh, you would, would you!" he snarled, and his fury unleashed itself to the tune of curses upon the Warlin until he felt the male's mind tremble and totter beneath his onslaught. Finally, fearful of either driving the creature insane, or of killing it, he let up.

The male shivered beneath his hand and abruptly collapsed. Bill stiffened, ready to apply fresh force, then realized that the creature was exhausted by the beating it had taken and close to unconsciousness.

Bill sat down beside it, keeping his hold on the fur.

"Rest then," he said. "But don't try anything. You aren't getting away from me."

Released, the Warlin's mind dropped like a stone into the mists of sleep.

They sat for an hour by the human's watch while the Warlin slept and Bill fidgeted, jumpy and nervous under the effects of the benzedrine tablet he had taken to ensure his staying alert. At the end of that time he tugged at the handful of fur.

"Come on," he growled. "Get up."

The Warlin's mind was reluctant to abandon the comfortable oblivion of sleep. It came back to awareness slowly with the somewhat confused impression that it was back in its den and that its mate was nipping playfully at its woolly hide. Then memory returned with a rush and its mind surged in an abrupt insane effort to throw off the human's control.

Bill beat it down. He was becoming more expert with practice and managed to return it to submission without wearing it out so much. He pulled the male to his feet.

"Let's go," he said.

Despairingly, the Warlin led off into the darkness once more. Now, it seemed, it had truly given up, for its mind was openly, nakedly sorrowing over memories of past happinesses. As if not caring whether the human mind could read it or not, the male's memory evoked pictures of meetings with his mate, of huntings, of homecomings to the den, of past victorious fights with others of his kind and of the tumbling of his young in play between his mighty front paws.

"Cut it out," said Bill derisively, "or I'll bust right out into tears."

But the Warlin ignored him. It thought on until gradually its mind began to dull and slow down like a whirlpool coming to rest. Gradually its thoughts became less and less perceptible, more and more unintelligible and feeble, like the fragmentary mumblings of a dying man. Until they ceased altogether and the Warlin stumbled, fell suddenly, and lay still.

Bill stared down at it.

"Damn it!" he swore. "Did he kick off on me after all?"

He probed the creature's mind with his own. It gave, soggy, without resistance, but with no reaction. He kicked the inert body but there was no response. Chagrined, he was reaching for his skinning knife, when remembrance of what he had heard

came back to him.

"Oh?" he said, with a lopsided grin. "Playing dead, huh?"

His grip tightened on the Warlin's wool, his lips skinned back over his teeth and he began to talk.

"Get up," he said, and continued to repeat the command monotonously. "Get up. Get up. Get up. Get up."

For a long minute there was no response. Then, with what was the equivalent of a sigh, life returned to the Warlin's mind and the creature stood up.

"To your den," commanded Bill. "Go!"

They went on.

FROM the number of tricks the male had been playing recently, Bill reasoned, his den must not now be far off. The man exulted in the thought without bothering to hide his exultation from the creature at his side. But the Warlin no longer seemed capable of resentment, or indeed of any feeling. He plodded on mechanically, and it was not far until Bill was able to sense from his mind that the den entrance would shortly be within sight.

They were passing through a particularly rough section of country. All Miza is tumbled with rock for reasons the geologists have not been able to agree on. But this was one of those unusually bad parts where you progressed by scrambling from boulder to boulder and it was necessary to watch closely for fear of slipping into the cracks.

In spite of this the Warlin led the human on, as though in a dream. He did not even look where his massive feet must go but strode surely forward while Bill scrambled beside him. The man cursed the terrain, then reflected that it would naturally be in such inaccessible sections that the Warlins would make their dens. Cheered up by this thought he continued without complaint. Still it was precarious going and only his firm grip on the Warlin's wool kept him from falling more than once.

Now, with the den entrance only a short distance away, Bill began to make his plans. The female would not be too much trouble but it was smart to have everything worked out in advance. He had a smoke bomb which would drive her out into the open. It would be a simple matter to stand by

the side of the hole until she came out, coughing and blinded, and then shoot her.

Credits. Bill licked his lips, tasting in anticipation the smoky Earth-bottled Scotch, the rich Venusian cigars that would be his portion once he had sold the skins. He would go back to one of the inner systems—he thought of going all the way back to Mars but that would be too expensive—and allow himself a three month spree before coming back for another hunt. This was the kind of work for a strong man—a short term of discomfort for high rewards. Eventually he would retire when the fascination of the hunt ceased to attract him. But by that time he would be rich.

Danger!

The warning rang suddenly in his mind as he felt a sudden blaze of defiance from the Warlin beside him. His mind, caught off balance, scrambled furiously to reassert itself but as it did so he felt the creature at his side lurch away, leaving only a handful of fur in his grasp.

The Warlin leaped—away from Bill—and head foremost into the pit between two huge boulders. Bill tottered on the edge.

In a second, however, he had righted himself and a furious wave of anger flooded through him.

"You stupid fool!" he yelled at the motionless bulk of the Warlin, crouched on the floor of the pit. "Don't you know you can't get away?"

There was no response from the Warlin mind and for a second Bill thought that it had found some hole down there and escaped, that it was just his imagination seeing it in the shadows of the pit. Then he realized that the pit was all of four meters deep—too far for mental contact to be maintained unless the Warlin wanted it and the Warlin quite evidently didn't.

Bill cursed again, and peered down. Yes, the creature was there, all right. Probably waiting poised to jump him the minute he came down. Probably hoping he wouldn't dare to come down.

Bill grinned sourly. If the Warlin thought it was going to get away that easily it was mistaken. It was a dangerous thing to jump down there and risk getting his skull beaten in before he could seize control of the

Warlin's mind. But what were a few risks when a fortune was at stake?

Cautiously, he lowered his legs over the edge of the boulder, hung for a moment, and then let go. There was a rush of wind past his ears and he half slid, half fell to the bottom of the pit. Above his head the night sky was now a small, irregular, star-studded patch of lighter black than that which surrounded him.

He landed on his feet, gun in hand, his mind flashing out ready to overcome the mind that faced him. But there was no response and the dark bulk of the Warlin did not come leaping at him.

Bill laughed out loud.

"Chickened out, huh?" he said. Contemptuously, he ignored the creature and looked up at the little patch of sky above him. What he saw made him swear suddenly.

In his haste to recapture the Warlin he had neglected to think of how he would get back out of the pit. Now he looked up at four meters of precipitous stone walls which were absolutely unclimbable.

For a second fear crept into his mind. Then a sudden thought sent it scurrying with its tail between its legs. He looked over at the Warlin who still had not moved.

"You outsmarted yourself that time, sonny boy," he said. "You thought I'd be trapped down here with you. But I'm not. I'll just get you to use some of that beef and toss me up to where I can grab a hold of the edge of that boulder."

He reached out to the creature's mind. It gave, soggily, without resistance, but with no reaction. Bill sneered.

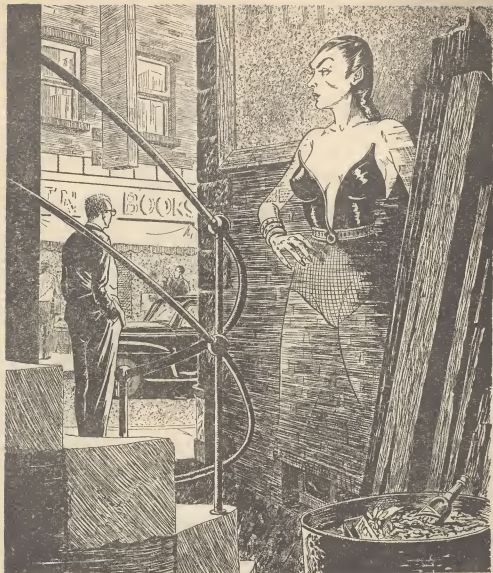
"You poor stupe," he said, "lying doggo again. Don't you remember you pulled that trick on me once before and it wouldn't work?"

Striding over to the Warlin, he kicked it viciously.

"Get up," he said, without heat, but with a bitter relentlessness. "Get up. Get up. Get up. Get up."

As has been said, the male Warlin will go to almost any lengths to protect its mate. Also, it is very good at playing dead.

Only, as Bill Rausch eventually discovered, this one wasn't playing.



IS THAT YOU XELUCHLI?

By DICK HETSCHER

Orena and Xeluchli meant well. But had they obeyed the rules, had they remained bodiless observers, they would have saved BUP, that .O2F star, a hellaceous catastrophe.

IT WAS a perfectly conventional tour, once around the Milky Way with stops at several of the major stars. It was supposed to take about eighty-eight

million years so they planned to be back for supper.

In the beginning the students had remained in a fairly close knot around mundo

Karftahiti, their instructor, but as the tour progressed some of the more venturesome strayed further and further from the rest of the class.

Dro Orena and Dro Xeluchli had wandered a greater distance than usual from the crowd and were jamming experimental thought webs into a large space vortex when Xeluchli signalled to Orena to tune her mind off the lecture frequency. It was against the rules, of course, but then Orena supposed Xeluchli would take the blame for her if they were caught, so she switched over to the conversational band.

"Want to have some fun?" asked Xeluchli.

Orena continued to stare into the space vortex. "How?" she asked.

Xeluchli waved a visible thought fragment in a circle about him. "The stars," he said. "Let's explore a little on our own. They never hit the really good spots on these tours."

Orena had been thinking for a long time of doing that very thing so she hardly argued at all before letting Xeluchli convince her.

"We'll be gone only a little while and they'll never miss us," said Xeluchli as they headed for a nearby star-cluster.

EVERYTHING would have been all right if they had obeyed the rules. "Hands off the planets," the rules said, and that was really a reasonable and intelligent demand. In all fairness to them, it must be admitted that Orena and Xeluchli had no intention of breaking that rule when they strayed away from the rest of the crowd.

They found this little planet which was listed in the textbook as "Bup"; an .02f star with nine planets. By a lucky chance they were just in time to see a transient little civilization spring into being on its third planet. This was too wonderful a chance to miss so they decided to stay a few hundred thousand years and see how it would end. They would catch up with the rest of the tour afterward.

The creatures entering into civilization were bipeds and of a physical appearance rather low on the aesthetic scale but Orena and Xeluchli soon discovered that they were

bi-sexual. This pleased them very much and made them feel that they had something in common with this little civilization, for Orena and Xeluchli were bi-sexuals too, and bi-sexual civilizations were rare. Orena and Xeluchli had, in fact, been the only bi-sexuals in the touring group, which had been composed mostly of the slow-moving amoeboids from Procyon and the emotionally unstable penta-sexuals from Antares.

It was a land civilization which they had found and, just as the textbooks said, it was having its beginning in the river deltas of the continents. The bipeds were both herbivorous and carnivorous and the duration and bloodiness of their early wars was almost exactly as predicted by Globnung's food-war formula. The speed of advance of the civilization was a little slow, but still comfortably within the lower limits of the Atati equation.

Everything went well for the first five thousand years, but then Orena and Xeluchli began to catch signs of Gibrat's anachronism. They watched anxiously for a while, and soon they saw that their fears had been justified. Sociological advance had fallen so far behind technological advance that the Law of Socio-Martial Flux had been brought into play. The little civilization would almost certainly die a premature death.

Orena and Xeluchli watched the invention of greater and greater weapons and the hopeless retardation of the social system and were saddened. They had hoped to watch a real civilization and this one was not even going to go past the one-planet stage. They did not see how it could last half a century more.

"And they're bi-sexuals, too," said Xeluchli. "It's a shame. I wish we could do something."

"Yes, but you know what the rules are," reminded Orena. "We can only watch. We can't help them."

"I know," said Xeluchli a little crossly. "A bunch of poly-sexuals and sixth-degree intellectuals make rules and we're supposed to obey them. You know, I'm tempted to interfere. No one would know."

Orena objected, but she was really in favor of violating the rule, too, and after a

while she let Xeluchli have his way.

"We'll start the civilization over," he suggested. "It was low in some qualities at the very start, but if we begin it over again with two above-average specimens I'm sure it will turn out better this time."

"We'll save one of each sex and destroy the rest of the race," agreed Orena. "It will be just like one of the controlled experiments in the laboratories of Arcturus 7, but on an even larger scale. Oh, this will be interesting!"

"We'll go down to the planet ourselves," said Xeluchli, "and pick the two creatures we'll use. We'll guide them and their descendants for a while until we're sure they'll turn out all right."

They had been heading down toward the planet and now they landed on a mountaintop. "Shall we stay together?" asked Orena.

"No, let's each of us observe the creatures separately at close range for a while. Then, after we've seen enough to make a good choice, we'll pick two of them and destroy the rest."

"We'll each pick one," suggested Orena. "You pick the female and I'll pick the male."

Xeluchli agreed, and added, "When you've found him, enclose him in a bubble of mental protection and turn your mind to wavelength OEC. I'll turn my mind to wavelength HHW when I have a female protected and the combination of these waves, each harmless by itself, will result in a .0008w wave which will destroy the rest of the race. Afterward we'll meet on this hill."

THERE was a city at the foot of the mountains and Orena headed there. She intermingled her atoms with those of a building for a while and watched from one of its inner walls, trying to get some idea of the habits of the bipeds.

At first she was puzzled by the fact that only one sex of the creatures entered the room she was watching. After a while, though, she began to suspect its true nature. She was learning little here, so she went out into the streets of the city where she could observe all phases of life.

At first she assumed a shape that the

bipeds could not see, but after a while she decided that she could best accomplish her purpose in the guise of one of the bipeds themselves. She turned herself into a female of the species and began in earnest her search for a desirable male.

She found that the society was very primitive in most respects and that it was not at all difficult to integrate herself into it. This was a new experience for her and one of the most thrilling things that had ever happened to her. One by one she dropped the use of senses and mental ranges not possessed by the bipeds to make the game more exciting. Soon her senses and thoughts were operating on a level hardly above that of the creatures themselves.

SHE often found herself wishing that she had paid more attention to her classes in the lower civilizations so she could better understand the things she was seeing. She was in no hurry to bring this adventure to an end, so for several weeks she investigated male after male, looking for one with a high socio-kinetic rating and a low or average techno-kinetic rating.

It was about thirty days later that she made her decision. She had been talking to a young male biped in a bookstore when she realized that he would do at least as well as any she had come across so far. She found that his name was Adam Henessey and she proceeded to sound him out a little further.

"And literature, then," she asked, picking up a book from one of the tables, "wouldn't you say that great literature should be placed above science?"

"Yes," Adam agreed, "the *material* is emphasized too strongly at present. We must pay more attention to the *spiritual*." He adjusted his eyelenses. "I believe that that is one of the major troubles of civilization." He tapped the ashes from his cigarette and looked at her for confirmation.

"Hell, yes!" she agreed heartily. "We are concentrating on the means and forgetting the ends."

"We are concentrating on the transient," he echoed, "and forgetting the eternal."

This bit of conversation was enough to convince the somewhat satiated Orena. She cast a web of mental protection over the

biped and set her mind to an OEI wavelength.

Obviously Xeluchli had already made his choice and set his mind to the HHW wavelength, for all the bipeds she could see except the protected Adam Henessey immediately fell to the ground and lay still. The effect was odd and uncheerful.

Now came one of the most interesting games she had played in her stay on the planet. She tried to match the biped's state of bewilderment and terror with one of her own and at the same time lead him to the top of the mountain. She could, of course, have transported him, protective web and all, to the mountaintop in a split second, but that would have seemed like cheating at the game. The web protecting Adam Henessey was invisible to his eyes and Orena continued to play the part of a fellow biped.

In his confused state, it was not difficult to lead Adam up the mountain by little suggestions or, often by merely taking the first step. She suggested that from the mountaintop they could see better what had happened and whether anyone else was alive. He even added the idea that they might get out of the area of contamination or whatever it was by climbing. "Heavy gases stay low," he said, assuming, apparently, that another war had been declared.

They were the first to reach the top. Xeluchli and his find were not yet in sight. Orena kept up her act while they waited.

She and Adam Henessey searched out over the valleys below and chattered worried ideas at each other.

Orena was secretly watching for Xeluchli whenever she looked down the mountain but soon the sun set and the light faded. It was very dark in the valleys and she did not wish to use any but biped eyes in the presence of Adam Henessey, at least not until Xeluchli arrived, so she gave up looking.

As time went by she began to get worried. It was cold on the mountain and she grew impatient to change to some other form. She searched the valleys below again, but not even a light of the dead city was visible.

The biped was growing nervous and she was not sure how much longer she could keep him here. He was standing sheltered by a crag of rock and gazing out into the dark spaces where the city had been, and for a long while Orena stood near him and looked far out into the valleys to the left.

Time passed and finally the sun began to rise and she grew more worried than ever. A terrible thought hit her and she shivered. She stole glances at Adam Henessey from time to time and she noticed that he was glancing queerly at her now and then. This continued for some time.

Finally she could stand it no longer. She turned to him and asked:

"Heavens, is that you, Xeluchli?"

She really did not need an answer.

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION, required by the Act of Congress of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Acts of March 3, 1933, and July 2, 1946, of PLANET STORIES, published bi-monthly at New York, N. Y., for October 1, 1951.

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130 West 42nd Street, New York 18, N. Y.

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Love Romances Publishing Co., Inc.,
130 West 42nd Street, New York 18, N. Y.
J. G. Scott,
130 West 42nd Street, New York 18, N. Y.

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5. The average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the 12 months preceding date shown above: (This information is required from daily, weekly, semiweekly, and triweekly newspapers only.)

(Signed) JACK O'SULLIVAN, Editor

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 28th day of September, 1951.

[SEAL]

GEORGE G. SCHWENKE,
Notary Public

(My commission expires March 30, 1952.)



A Novelet of Grim New Worlds

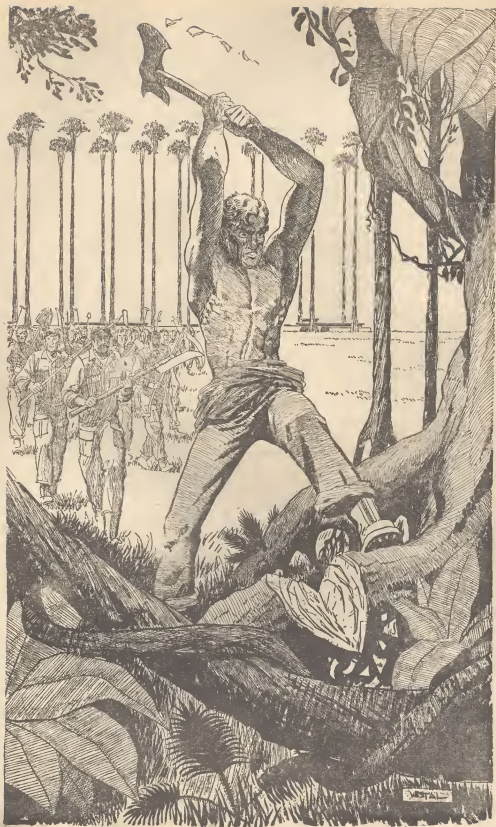
The Ambassadors from Venus

By KENDELL FOSTER CROSSEN

Strange. Strange. The empty space ships. The patched voices. The curt invitation to Venus. But what had Clyde Ellery and the other atom-plague survivors to lose? They forgot there are many kinds of death!

THE FIRST SHIP landed in a plowed field fifty miles from the city, just beyond the signs that warned of radiation. Rather circular in shape, it was fully sixty feet across and twenty feet in thickness, its color a burnished green. It came down swiftly until it was fifty feet from the ground; then a gush of flame poured from the under side and checked its fall. It settled to the soil, like a giant mushroom, and there was a smell of scorched earth in the air.

Max Carr was the first to see it. He was sitting under the gnarled apple tree in the front yard, and he watched the ship settle down on that tail of fire. He should have been out in the fields planting, but he wasn't. He hadn't worked in months, beyond milking the cows and tossing them wisps of hay. He knew that a hundred million people had died in America the day the bombs fell, that hundreds of millions, more had died in Europe the following day, and in Asia and Africa the day after, as



American atomic bombs rocketed in reply to the sudden attack.

He knew that millions had died since, and were still dying as the radioactivity bit deep into their bones and flesh. He felt the clutch of death on himself, so he looked at the ship with little curiosity. It was a strange ship, but there was nothing it could do that had not already been done.

But when nothing happened, when no strange warriors came swaggering from the ship, his sluggish interest uncoiled and took on life. He called his wife and children and they cautiously approached the ship. Still nothing happened. It seemed to be made of solid metal, with no windows or doors. They touched the strange metal and stared at the blackened ground, and then returned to the lethargy that was their daily fare.

The ship might have set there in the field, forgotten for months, if a neighbor hadn't stopped by that evening. He saw the ship and asked questions and carried the news away with him. It was the first thing that had happened in months which was at least neutral, and he stopped at three houses to talk about it. He was tired of talking about death.

Three days later, they trudged into Max Carr's farm, some of them coming from as far as twenty miles away. A dozen men and women stood in the field and stared at the ship. Max Carr and his wife joined them.

"Big, huh?" one of the men said, but no one answered him. They were a small community in which everything had been said.

Two more men came along the road, their dragging feet kicking up little spurts of dust, and turned into the field. After fifteen minutes, another arrived. It was when he drew near the ship that it happened.

There was a loud click from somewhere inside the ship and a crack appeared in the side as a panel slid back. Soon there was an opening, large enough for a man to enter or leave. It was dark within. But no one came from the ship, nor was there a single step taken nearer it. The small group stood and waited.

"People of Earth," said a harsh voice from the ship, "you have just come through a war and there are few of you left alive. There is little hope for any of you, for the

radioactivity is spreading over the entire face of your planet. This ship has come to invite those of you who are not sick to establish a colony on the planet which you call Venus. You may pick one of your group to represent you. If he is not already a victim of radiation, he will be permitted to enter this ship and learn more of this plan."

The voice cut off with an audible click.

THE MEN AND WOMEN in the field shuffled about in indecision. They stared at each other in fear. Who among them was not sick? There was doubt on every face and in everyone the thought that it would be better not to know. Then the self-searching ended as though by common consent, with every eye swinging to a man who stood apart from the group.

Clyde Ellery was a scientist, one of the few to escape the death of their own making. On vacation, high in a mountain retreat, he had seen the sky turn angrily red, had watched the pall of smoke. He had hurried back, but there was nothing to do. There was no place that the Geiger counter did not purr its message, and all he could do was mark the dividing line between quick death and slow death. He had watched the faces turned toward him, burning anger checked by the knowledge that there was no punishment to fit the crime. Under the weight of those glances, the burden of being alone, Clyde Ellery's shoulders had stooped and rounded. He walked alone, and recognized its justice.

There was a difference in the looks now turned in his direction. He sensed it, even before he lifted his head. His gaze went swiftly from face to face and in those few silent seconds the appointment was made and accepted. Clyde Ellery's thin shoulders straightened and he stepped forward, walking through the small crowd to the ship. At the doorway, he stopped. There was a queer rigidity to his body, as if he were leaning against an invisible barrier. For a full minute he stood there, unmoving, being tested by others than his neighbors.

"This man has no sickness," the voice from the ship announced suddenly. "He may enter."

Clyde Ellery stepped through the door and was gone into the darkness beyond.

THE SUN GLINTED from the burnished green hull, but no light entered the blackness that was the doorway. There was nothing to see or hear. The men and women stood patiently in front of the ship and waited. They seemed unaware of the passage of time, for they lived in the stasis of a minute.

Shadows were longer by a foot or more when Clyde Ellery again appeared among them. There was an expression of hope on his face, but they stared back without understanding.

"We must leave the field," he told them. They followed him across the furrowed ground, accepting for the moment his leadership. Beyond the staggering rail fence, near to the once-red barn, he turned to look back at the strange ship.

The doorway was closed and once again there was only the smooth metal, looking green and alive against the brown earth. As they watched, the ship quivered, then rose a few feet on a single leg of fire. It hung poised in the air as the fire fanned out, grew solid and orange. There was no sound, but they could feel the heat against their faces. The pillar of fire lengthened, pushing the ship against the sky. Then the fire lifted from the earth and the ship was flashing out of sight, leaving only the offal of blackened soil as proof of its visit.

Clyde Ellery turned and walked to where the gnarled apple trees guarded Max Carr's house. He dropped to the ground. The others seated themselves around him and waited. The children grouped near the pump and were silent.

"It'll be back," Clyde Ellery said, and there was confidence in his voice. The strength of words had been redeemed. "It has gone to other communities like this one—all over the world. But it will return—it and other ships like it."

He paused, but there were no questions. The hope that was within him found no new ground. They were aware of no questions that had not been answered by the bursting flame and mushrooming smoke he had helped to make. They expected no answers, yet they respected that which they saw in his face.

"The ship was empty," Clyde Ellery said after a while, "but there was a recording

which told me everything. There is to be another chance for Man—for those of us who are not yet radioactive."

They waited patiently, these men and women who had looked too long upon death to recognize life.

"The ship is from Venus—built by what, I don't know. Speech, as we know it, must be unknown, for the recording we all heard, and those that were played for me, were pieced together from words recorded here on earth. Almost every word was spoken by a different voice. They must have recorded many conversations here, then picked out the needed words and made up their message on new records. It indicates no spoken language, perhaps no vocal cords, but a high degree of intelligence."

He was the only one interested in the high degree of intelligence.

"The ships are apparently remote-controlled," he said, and it was easy to see that he was dreaming of the science that had made such ships possible. "I suspect the ships are magnetic-powered for the record said that the trip to Venus can be made very quickly—a matter of hours." He realized then that among his listeners there was not one who cared how the ship was powered. He said bluntly, "All the people of Earth who are still healthy are invited to go to Venus. One half of the entire planet will be given to us. We must take with us our own animals and our own plant seeds, those that are also healthy. They will provide as many ships as are necessary."

"The ships are somehow built to detect the healthy and the unhealthy. It will be impossible for a person, an animal, or for any seed, to pass within the ship unless it is healthy. There will be no chance for the sickness to take root in the new colony."

They had come to accept death for all, and there was only fear at the thought that some of them might live. They stared stolidly at a point just above Clyde Ellery's head.

"The climate and the atmosphere on Venus are pretty much the same as here," Clyde Ellery continued. "There is more precipitation—more rain, but not too much. The soil is rich, and will not need fertilizers for years. One half of the planet—the half towards Earth—will be ours to cultivate

and govern as we please. We may take as many personal possessions with us as we wish, as long as they are free from radio-activity. There—there is—"his voice faltered, then went on—"one other requirement in accepting their help. We cannot take any equipment or literature necessary to the making of weapons of war, including atomic bombs, and the record said that any attempt to make destructive weapons on Venus will bring death to those doing it. Other than that, there will be no interference. The ships will be here within a week."

A bird chirped feebly from the branches of the apple tree, but there was no other sound. The men and women sat quietly in the grass and looked at Clyde Ellery without emotion. From farther off, the children stared in futile imitation.

"That's all," Clyde Ellery said lamely. "The ships for this area will land in the same field. Within a week." He paused, then walked toward the road. He was alone again, a leader with no followers.

By ones and twos, the others left as the sun dropped lower. No words were given, no promises made, in the leaving. No man looked to his neighbor.

IT WAS AN uneventful week. The women still cooked meals automatically, and between meals they stared endlessly through windows; the men still did a few chores or sat in the shade and stared. Here and there a man might lift his head to the skies and feel a stirring of something like hope, but then he'd see a withered plant or walk through the fields to find a dead cow and he'd go back to sitting in the shade. And it was the same all over the world, whether the man was black or yellow or white.

The same ship returned to the field on Max Carr's farm. With it were a number of other ships, larger by far. They covered the field, like strange green growths, and the earth was black from their flames.

They stood there, empty and waiting for the people to come. And come they did, without hope and with little curiosity. Still they came, walking through the dry dust, riding in Fords and Cadillacs, driving horses and oxen and even goats. They came

for days in an endless stream of plodding humanity, clutching personal possessions, carrying precious bags of seeds, driving livestock before them. Men and women and squawling children. Some wore scars where they could be seen, great livid welts that gave mute testimony to the progress of man; others bore their scars unseen. All were silent and looked away quickly if they met another's eye.

The doors of the ships opened and the recorded voice from the smaller ship told them to enter the other ships, taking with them their seed and their animals. In listless streams they poured through the nearest doorways, and some came out of one door and some from another. Some entered holding a bag of seed and came out holding two. There were husbands and wives who went in holding hands and came out by different doors. As they left the ships, they stood where the voice directed them. Slowly one group grew, one or two at a time adding to its numbers, while the other swelled out over the field.

Those in the smaller group looked to the larger and there were many who saw a beloved, a husband or wife, a child or parent, standing among the rejected. A hand that a moment before had gripped another now clutched the limp throat of a bag filled with dying seed. There were some who gazed across the field, then looked briefly through a mist of sadness and longing at the shimmering ships before stepping across to volunteer for death with those they could not leave. There were others who looked across to the larger group and turned away to weep, but stayed where they were.

For several days the sorting of seed and equipment, animals and people, continued. The two camps became little tent villages with smoldering fires. Thin rays of light, unseen during the day, soft blue at night, reached out from the ships between the two groups. Those from the smaller group could pass through the rays, but when two men tried to sneak in among the chosen they were stopped as though by a brick wall. Others tried going around the fingers of light late at night, but the rays curved and drove them back. None of the rejected left, but camped there in silent resignation. One place was the same as another, and they had

nothing to do but wait.

Clyde Ellery worked day and night, helping to form the lines, carrying children and packages, seeing that the campers had enough to eat. He almost forgot himself in the pressing needs of the exodus.

On the third day, the smaller ship again shot into the sky and vanished from sight. On the morning of the fourth day, just as the last of the sorting was being done, it returned. The door yawned blackly and the recorded voice spoke:

"Those who have shown no evidence of radiation will please enter the large ships." The small group stirred into life and began to file into the ships, prodding their animals before them. Here and there a man or woman waved in the direction of the larger group and looked quickly away; but the rest of them looked rigidly ahead as they went.

Clyde Ellery again helped, wondering if he should enter the last ship. Then the chosen were all loaded, while beyond the fence those who were to stay watched wordlessly. Children of the atom, Clyde Ellery thought fleetingly, and turned to enter the ship only to find his way barred by the closing panel. For a swift moment, he felt panic flooding him.

"The man," said the metallic voice from the small ship, "who first entered this ship will now enter again."

CLYDE ELLERY crossed the field quickly and stepped into the ship. On his first visit, he had turned to the right into a small chamber where the recorded voice had spoken to him. But this time he felt some unseen force turning him to the left. He followed the pressure and entered a large room. Weird flickering lights blazed from niches high on the rounded wall. Scattered around the room were various-sized pads similar in shape to chairs. A number of other men looked up as he entered.

The floor quivered beneath his feet. There was a quick surge of soundless power, and he knew they were taking off. His body was heavy and ungainly; there was a feeling of pressure which brought with it a quick nausea. Then, slowly, he was aware of an adjustment in the room. The pressure eased off, gravity returned to normal. The

ringing in his ears stopped and his stomach righted itself. Having seen the ship take off, he knew that they were traveling at a rate of speed never before known on Earth, yet he was soon unaware of movement at all. He stepped forward to become acquainted with the others.

He had seen at a glance that these were men from all over the world—their faces all colors and shapes. Slowly making his way around the room, he learned their names. It was an exotic roll call—Wang Chin Kwang, Anton Dubov, Jean-Paul Monet, David Hellman, Courtland Stokes, Riyad el Khoury, Kano Mbabane, Alexandre Spaak, Boleslaw Rzymowski, Vincent Ravielli, Mohandas Punjab, Konstantinos Piraeus. To it, he added the name of Clyde Ellery. Language was only a minor problem, for there was always someone who could translate when he was unable to understand. There were as many occupations and trades as there were faces. Some wore a look of guilt that faded slowly, and some still held confusion darkly in their eyes. But in all there was the slow-fuse of a new hope.

Each, Clyde Ellery found, had gone through much the same experience as he had. Each of them represented the science of his community, whatever its stage, ranging from Kano Mbabane, a witch doctor, to Ellery who was a nuclear physicist.

As the ship flashed silently on its journey, the men explored. The hull was of a metal unknown on Earth. They were able to groove deep scratches in its surface with an ordinary penknife, but within two minutes the scratch would vanish. It felt almost soft to the touch, but was obviously of great strength. They began to understand its purpose, if not its structure, when a section of the wall suddenly bulged inward more than a foot, then slowly smoothed out.

"Good heavens," exclaimed Courtland Stokes, as they stared at the retreating bulge, "that must have been a small meteorite! Imagine the uses of a metal with the strength to resist such a force. Why if we'd had this metal—"

He broke off, but the thought was there. This was a metal which might have resisted even the atom bomb.

Two of the men translated his remarks into the other languages.

"*Djen shi dje yang dy mo?*" Wang Chin asked dryly.

There was no need to translate the comment. They all understood the ironic tones. Stokes' thought had reminded them that if they and their kind had used atomic energy for the benefit of the world there would have been no need for a defense against it. They turned to other things within the ship in order to forget the thought.

LIGHT for the interior of the ship came from shoulder-high recesses around the wall. They looked into them, expecting an improved lighting system, surprised at finding only small steady-burning flames. The flames seemed to be coming from the center of a small green plant. One of the men stretched a hand toward a small flame only to withdraw it quickly with an exclamation of pain. The heat was intense for several inches around the flame, but then it dissipated quickly.

The remainder of the ship was just as strange. The seating arrangements around the interior of the ship seemed to be made of broad thick leaves, somehow fused together, yet still feeling alive. In the small compartment, where each of them had originally gone to listen to the recordings, they discovered a number of fibrous cones which were apparently the records. One was still in a position which indicated that it had not yet been used, while the others were dropped to one side. But they were unable to examine them, for there was some sort of energy belt which kept them at a distance.

There was another small compartment which was apparently the engine room, or what would have corresponded to it in an Earth ship. But there were no mighty motors, as might have been indicated by the power of the ship—only a small hopper into which another hopper fed a continuous stream of crimson pellets. Except for their color, these looked like large seeds. The men guessed that in some way the second hopper broke down the atomic structure of the pellets to convert them into power, but again they were frustrated in their attempts at closer examination by an invisible belt of energy.

Hardly had they finished their sketchy inspection when they felt the ship decel-

erate. A moment later, they were aware that the ship had come to rest. The door did not immediately open, so they turned expectantly toward the compartment of the cones. They did not have long to wait.

"You are now on the planet you know as Venus," the voice said in English, with that strange change of voice on almost every word. "You who have helped to organize your own kind for this trip are the first to arrive. The other ships will begin to arrive within an hour, so there will be time for you to do preliminary planning. As you leave the ship, you will notice that this half of the planet has been cleared of all native vegetation with the exception of a few trees. You will find that they are so arranged as not to interfere with the construction of your housing, so you are requested not to destroy them. They will not cross-breed with your own vegetation. You will notice that arrangements have been made for the protection of the ships which brought you here; but for the rest—you are on your own, Earth-men. You may now leave the ship."

The door opened and the men hurried out, anxious to see the world which would become a new Earth.

"Strange," Stokes muttered to Clyde Ellery, as they filed through the door. "From the way that record was worded, it sounds as if the natives who sent the ships for us do not intend to show themselves at all. Deuced peculiar."

"Maybe not so strange," Clyde Ellery said. "Remember the theories that evolution on other planets may have followed an entirely different line than on Earth? This may be the case, and, knowing the tendency of humans to dislike anything different from themselves, the natives may have wisely decided to stay in hiding for the time being."

"Whatever they are," said David Hellman, who had been listening, "they are certainly more advanced than we, so any contact should be to our advantage."

"If our hosts ever decide that they want anything to do with us," Clyde Ellery said dryly. He waved ahead of them as they stepped to the ground. "And they apparently don't as yet."

Ahead of them stretched the broad, flat

continent. With two exceptions, all there was to see was rich-looking, bare soil. There was a looseness to the dirt which made it seem that not so long ago it had been cultivated, but now there was not so much as a blade of grass. The bareness of the black earth made the exceptions even more noticeable. Not far from where their ship was grounded, there were two rows of trees, about the width of an Earth city street apart. The trees were towering, half again as tall as the giant redwoods of Earth. The leaves, a delicate pink in color, were broad and oval, curling at the edges to form almost a perfect ball. These hung down from the limbs, swaying toward the ground. From each rounded leaf there were two waving tendrils, looking almost like antennae, ranging from a deep pink at the base to a light purple at their tips.

Back of where the ship had grounded, there was a rounded, dome-like structure, large enough to house several hundred of the ships. Green in color, it seemed to be built of broad, flat leaves. Around it were a number of trees, their limbs twisting far above the building. Their leaves were long and tapering, a deep orange in color, while the trunk and limbs were dark green. From each limb hung dozens of pods, fully three feet long and a foot thick at the center, tapering to an end which seemed to have an opening three or four inches in diameter.

For the rest, there was only rich dark soil for almost as far as the eye could see. At a distance, where the curve of land met the sky, they could see the edge of what appeared to be almost a jungle. But, except for the tree leaves moving restlessly in the slight breeze, there was no movement, no sound.

Within the hour the other ships began arriving, in groups of two and three. First to land were those which had been loaded with material. As the passenger ships landed, the men were divided into two groups. One was set to putting up tents which could shelter them that night, while the other swiftly unloaded materials and began to throw up the prefabricated walls of the first Earth buildings.

When night came on the strange planet, darkness descending quickly, bringing with it a light pattering of rain. A city of

tents had mushroomed across the Venusian plains and skeletal walls were already thrusting skyward near the double line of trees.

THE EARTHLINGS were up with the sun the following morning, small fires blazing among the tents as the women busied themselves with breakfast. The men held a hasty meeting, and elected as a temporary council to govern them the men who had come in the first ship. They in turn elected Clyde Ellery as their first chairman.

That second day upon Venus was a hectic one. A hasty tabulation revealed that they were a little more than two hundred thousand strong—counting children and infants—all that were still healthy from Earth's once thriving billions. Architects and city planners were found among them and Earth City began to go up with a rush. As one building was being finished, the plans for the next one were being handed to the workers. Construction crews were followed by electricians; plumbing went into houses as cesspools were still being dug. Farms were laid out around the new city, all of them equal in size, and furrows were being turned while surveyors still sighted through their instruments.

For two weeks the work continued at the same mad pace. And that section of Venus more and more took on the look of Earth. The broad fields were sectioned in geometric patterns where already tender green plants and young grass shoots were thrusting their way through the soil. Within fenced plots, the cows and horses munched on their hay and looked with longing at the tender shoots. Chickens scratched in the black dirt, and roosters greeted the Venusian sunrise with the same clarion voices as on Earth.

Within the city, which had now spread to almost ample size, flowers were already growing in the yards. Clothes, bought in Cleveland and Pinsk, in Surrey and Isfahan, hung side by side to dry in the Venusian sun. The main street, running between the two rows of strange trees with their curved and nodding leaves, was lined with stores bearing signs in almost every language of Earth. The colony had already issued its own money and business was flourishing.

Earth City possessed every business and profession save one—they had no use for a mail man.

It was on the fifteenth day of their stay on Venus, when the work was slackening down to normal, that two of the colonists decided that if they had some extra wood they would build corncribs although it was still some time before they would have corn. They shouldered axes, mounted horses and rode off toward the line of jungle that marked the edge of the land given to Earth people.

Hours later, the two horses returned without the riders, and a search party was formed.

It was almost dark when the two men were found, lying unconscious not far from the edge of the strange and exotic forest. When they were revived, they remembered only that there had seemed to be some sort of barrier trying to keep them out of the forest. One of them described it as a strong wind, although there had been no wind blowing. But they had forced their way against it, shoving step by step within the jungle, and that was the last they remembered. Both had the impression that something must have struck them down. Much bruised and shaken, they were helped back to their homes, and the story of their experience spread rapidly.

That evening, a voice spoke to the colonists. It was a voice much like the one heard from the first ship to land on Earth, but this one sounded as if it came through several loudspeakers. Its message was simple.

"People of Earth," the voice said; "you were offered a generous portion of this planet, and ships were sent to bring you from your sickened homes, with the understanding that you would not attempt to enter the other portions, nor would you harm any of the life already existing here. Yet some of you have tried to break this agreement, intending to destroy local trees. Do not let this happen again."

There was no way to tell from where the voice came.

That night there was a Town Meeting; and by the time it was called it seemed that the entire colony was there and waiting. There were angry looks on many of

the faces and on some the anger was mixed with fear. It was obvious that they had already talked among themselves about the earlier incident, for little time was lost once the meeting was called to order by Clyde Ellery. A big, red-headed man stood up in the center of the building.

"I'm Lennie Johnson," he said loudly, "but I reckon I'm talking for most of them here. And we don't like the way things are going."

"Are you referring to the accident that happened to Roberts and Sayyid?" Clyde Ellery asked.

"You're damned right I am," the red-headed man said, "and we don't think it was an accident. When we were first invited to come up here, most of us thought it was a pretty neighborly thing. We had the idea that there was a bunch of people up here, pretty much like ourselves, and they were acting the way any of us would if a neighbor was in trouble. But now we ain't so sure. Why was them ships sent down to us and why was this land turned over to us? And why ain't we seen anybody?"

A murmur from the crowd showed that others were thinking the questions he asked. Clyde Ellery rapped for order and said: "I'm afraid that we haven't been in a position to question our gift too strongly. It has been enough that we've had the opportunity of saving our lives."

"Have we now?" shouted the big red-headed man. "We're beginning to get a different idea about it. If this thing was on the up and up—if there was people up here who wanted to help us—why, then, they'd have been around to welcome us when we got here. They'd have showed up like honest men instead of skulking around in that jungle out there to knock out a couple of good men without so much as a by-your-leave."

"But Roberts and Sayyid were breaking the agreement—" Ellery began.

"And whose agreement?" demanded the man in the hall. "We never made no agreement, so it's nothing but orders. It's a free world and we don't have to take no such orders from anybody—on Earth or here. We'll go where we please and stay where we please."

CLYDE ELLERY was annoyed, but he tried not to show it. A glance at the other council members showed him they shared his reaction. "What do you propose we do about it?" he asked the red-headed man.

"We don't care what you do about it," the man retorted, "but we're going back to Earth. We know where we stand on Earth and we don't have to worry about a bunch of savages ambushing us every time we turn around."

"How do you intend to do this? The ships which brought us were remote-controlled."

"We've got pilots and mechanics. We'll find some way to make the damn things work."

"One more thing," Clyde Ellery said. "If some of you wish to leave, and *if* the ships can be made to operate, the matter will still have to be taken up by this council. We were duly elected to represent this community for its best interests, and we will not permit a few unruly characters to endanger the entire colony."

"Yeah?" the red-headed man said with a grin. He turned and looked around the hall. "Everybody who wants to go back to Earth," he shouted, "raise your hand, so these wise guys can see where they stand."

Almost every hand in the hall was raised.

"There's been a new election," the red-headed man said, turning back to the council. "You boys want to come along with the rest of us, or stay here until some Venusian cannibal decides you're fat enough to eat?"

"Hey!" a voice shouted from the back of the hall. "Fire!"

There was a red glare visible through the windows, unnoticed until now. The crowd jammed and shoved their way out of the building, the council following as fast as they could. Once outside, they could see the flames leaping toward the sky as something beyond the edge of the city burned.

The crowd ran through the streets but when they reached the limits of Earth City they came to an abrupt halt and stared at the flames which were taking a decision out of their hands.

The huge domed structure which housed the strange space ships was a mass of writhing flames. The fire crackled and roared, flames twisting upward to lick against the orange leaves of the towering trees. And the crowd stood and watched, for they knew that there was nothing to be done. The colony had fire-fighting equipment, but nothing that would handle such a fire as this.

An hour later, the building was a blackened crater, and all that was left of the space ships were smoking lumps of the strange metal. The crowd of colonists turned and walked silently through the streets of the untouched city.

THERE was a grimness about the Earth men the following morning. Clyde Ellery was first aware of the new note when he awakened to hear the plodding thump of many feet. He looked out of the window to see several hundred men marching down the main street. Every man in the group was armed in some crude fashion. Many carried axes and clubs, while others hefted sledge hammers and crowbars as they marched out of the city in the direction of the Venusian jungle. At the head of the group strode the red-headed man, an axe gleaming brightly over his shoulder.

Clyde Ellery hurriedly dressed and sought the other council members. Most of them had also seen the mob and were ready. Here and there within Earth City they were able to find a small handful of men who had not joined the others and these became the council's posse. Unarmed, they mounted horses and rode after the crowd. None of them was quite sure of what they could do, but felt that something had to be done.

They rode swiftly, but even so too much time had elapsed. They were still several miles from the jungle when they saw the knot of men, the sun glinting from the weapons they carried, move resolutely into the green wall and vanish. As they spurred their horses forward, they heard the distant shout of the red-headed man as he led his troops forward. It seemed to them that the cry was cut off abruptly, and then there was silence except for the hoofbeats and labored breathing of the horses.

As they neared the jungle, the council was greeted by a sight which made them

pull their horses up short. From the forest came the mob of men, the red-headed man still leading them, marching with the same vigor with which they had gone in. But the grimness had fled from their faces, to be replaced by a relaxed friendliness. They halted as they recognized the horsemen. The red-headed man looked up at Clyde Ellery with an easy grin.

"Out riding, Councilor Ellery?" he asked pleasantly.

"What happened in there?" Ellery asked, nodding toward the jungle.

"Why, nothing," the red-headed man said with surprise. "Why should anything happen?"

"What were you men doing in there?"

For a moment the red-headed man looked perplexed, his gaze shifting from Ellery to the jungle and then back to Ellery; then his expression cleared. "Why, me and the boys were just looking around," he said. "Since we're going to be living here for the rest of our lives, we thought we might as well take a look at this jungle. We figured there might be some dangerous animals in it and if there was we ought to know about it. But it looks like everything's okay."

The council members exchanged glances. "But what about your idea of going back to Earth?" Clyde Ellery asked.

This time the red-headed man was really surprised. "You must be off your rocker, councilor," he said. "We like it here."

"Well, if you were only looking around," Ellery said, "why did each of you bring a weapon?"

The red-headed man glanced down at the axe he was carrying and frowned. "I'll be damned if I know," he said. "It just seemed like a good idea at the time. Well, councilor, me and the boys better be getting back to work. We'll be seeing you."

The councilors sat on their horses and watched the man march off toward the city with swinging strides. Then they rode silently along behind them.

Back in Earth City, the council members quartered their horses and went straight to the town hall, straight to the private room that served for their council meetings.

"What do you think happened?" Clyde Ellery asked slowly.

"Seems rather obvious," Courtland Stokes said, running a hand through his thinning hair. "They showed all the symptoms of having been hypnotized. Apparently, the minute they entered the forest with the intention of destruction, they were hypnotized and given a post hypnotic block which made them completely forget their original reactions."

"Clever, these—Venusians," said Wang Chin Kwang, privately amused at the new usage of an old expression.

"However," Clyde Ellery said slowly, "the action of these men does bring up something which we have pretty much ignored since we landed—the question of our hosts. I confess I'm not too satisfied with the explanation that they are merely a strange life form which doesn't show itself to us because we may be prejudiced."

"Have any of you thought about that fire last night?" David Hellman asked. "It looked as if some intelligence knew that some of us were planning to leave and so deliberately burned the space ships."

"Yes," Stokes said dryly, "it occurred to me that the fire might be evidence that our—hosts were determined that we stay on Venus."

"But why?" demanded Clyde Ellery. There was no answer, and for a moment the members of the council knew the same fear of the unknown which had been on the faces of the colonists the night before. Clyde Ellery cleared his throat. "For the moment," he said, "it would seem to me that our most pressing problem is one of finding some way of communicating with our hosts and determining the exact status we are to enjoy here. Are there any suggestions?"

There were none. After a few more pointless and nervous remarks, the council adjourned.

IT WAS the next day that they were reminded of the corncribs which had started the whole thing. That morning Arthur Roberts, whose farm was nearest to the jungle, went out to find a number of sheets of metal lying in his field. They were obviously of the same material which had been used in the space ships. Stranger still, they were of the exact sizes to build

the corncrib as Arthur Roberts had imagined it.

Most of the colonists took this as evidence of the good intentions of their unseen hosts, but it only served to increase the uneasiness of the council.

Two days later, they were quickly summoned by Jean-Paul Monet. Without offering an explanation, he insisted that they again mount their horses and ride toward the jungle. As they neared the giant wall of green, they heard a strange thumping noise ahead of them and once more pressed Monet for answers.

"You will soon see," he said grimly. "For two days, I have stayed in the fields watching for the secret to the metal. Now, you will see what I witnessed early this morning."

A few minutes later, the men reined their horses to a stop and stared into the jungle, scarcely believing what they saw.

Near the outer edge of lush, living green, there was a huge vine. Its creepers, almost a foot thick and covered with cup-shaped thick leaves, seemed to enter the ground at intervals and then reappear to grow along the top. But the Earth men soon realized that the creepers were moving, as though growing at a tremendous rate. And each time one of the scarlet cup-shaped leaves appeared out of the ground it dumped a greenish lump of something on the ground. On looking closer, they saw that the ground here was covered with the broad flat leaves of some other plant.

Towering above this scene were a number of orange-leaved trees like those which had surrounded the field where the space ships first landed. As they watched, the green limbs of these trees swayed and bent until the huge green pods were directly over the lumps cast up out of the ground. Then, from what they had thought were seed pods, came a gush of white fire, striking the lumps. Under that direct fire, so strong that the horses shied from the heat a hundreds yards away, the lumps took on a fire of their own.

From the edge of the jungle there grew long stalks with what had seemed to be large square flowers on them. But, as the men watched, the stalks whipped forward and the flowers descended upon the heated

lumps. It was this which was producing the thumping noise they'd heard, and each blow from the square flowers was helping to pound the lumps into sheets of metal.

As the men watched, the last lump of metal was cast up, heated, flattened and cast aside. The thumping ceased, the flames died out, and once more the jungle was a wall of exotic plants and trees swaying gently in the breeze. If it hadn't been for the sheets of metal on the ground, they might have imagined that what they had seen had been an illusion. But there were a good six-dozen sheets of metal on the ground before them.

It was Clyde Ellery who finally dismounted and approached the jungle. The others sat on their horses and watched him. They saw him stoop to gaze intently at the giant creeper on the ground and then step briskly into the jungle. He did not go far, but seemed to stand there in an attitude of listening for several minutes. Then he turned and walked briskly back to where the others waited. He mounted his horse and turned its head toward the distant city.

"Well?" demanded Courtland Stokes, when Ellery still said nothing. "What happened in there?"

"Nothing," Clyde Ellery said. He seemed surprised that anyone should think that anything had happened. "I merely looked into the jungle and came back. After all, it was part of our agreement that we not enter that part of the planet."

"But you stood there for several minutes," Stokes insisted.

"I'm afraid you must be wrong," Ellery said. "I believe I'm quite aware of what I'm doing when I do it. I merely glanced into the forest to see if there was any more metal there. The minute I saw there wasn't, I turned around. In fact, I distinctly remember that I didn't even stop walking."

The others exchanged glances, but said nothing more. When they reached Earth City, they agreed to hold a meeting that afternoon and then separated.

BY THE TIME the council met, Clyde Ellery was aware that he too had been hypnotized when he tried to enter the jungle. But he had no memory of what had happened. It still seemed to him that

he had merely glanced into the jungle and had then retraced his steps.

The meeting was delayed because of Alexandre Spaak, who at last came bustling in, his face tense with excitement.

"Wait until you hear this," he said in answer to the questioning looks. "You know my house is at the edge of town, not far from the spot where the space ships were kept? Well, this afternoon, the kids were missing. I went looking for them and finally found them playing under those big Venusian trees with the orange leaves. You know, the same kind of trees we saw with flames shooting out of their pods to melt that metal? Well, take a guess what my kids were doing?"

"What was it?" Ellery said irritably. "Don't make us play guessing games."

"Among the foodstock my wife and I brought to Venus," Spaak said, "was a package of marshmallows. The kids had the marshmallows on the ends of sticks and there were little tiny flames coming out of the tree pods, roasting them. If you remember those trees at all, you'll remember the nearest pods were at least fifteen feet from the ground—which means the tree had to bend its limbs down to reach the marshmallows the children were holding."

"But how did your children control the flames?" Stokes asked. "Those flames we saw this morning would have blasted them to ashes within twenty feet."

"The children weren't controlling the flame," Spaak said. "The tree was controlling the flame for the benefit of the children."

"I have a feeling," said Jean-Paul Monet, "that the colonists were right the other night. We should leave this planet."

"How?" Wang Chin Kwang murmured.

"A minute, gentlemen," Alexandre Spaak broke in. "I believe I have solved the mystery of our hosts." He paused and looked around at the others. "Gentlemen, the intelligent life which invited us to this planet is the plant life of Venus."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Stokes. "The intelligent life which invited us here is one capable of building space ships—an engineering feat beyond even the highly advanced technical skill of Earth. You don't

mean to say a plant could do that!"

"You forget," said Spaak, "that all of us stood in a field this morning and watched a plant dig ore out of the ground, another plant smelt the ore, a third plant flatten it into sheets of metal, using a fourth plant as an anvil. After seeing that flame tree in action, there can be no doubt that the flame trees also deliberately destroyed the space ships when some of us were about to use them to leave Venus. No, gentlemen, I tell you that the intelligent and dominant life on this planet consists of trees, bushes, vines, and so on down to the smallest plant. That, incidentally, must be the reason we were told to bring our own plants and not to touch any of the plant life here."

"You are right, Earth-Man."

FOR A MOMENT, the thirteen men in the room sat, frozen, not daring to look at each other. It had not been a voice speaking this time, yet each had heard the thought within his head. As each of them realized that all had heard it, that the thought had not been a personal hallucination, they relaxed. Quickly, they looked around the room. But there was no one there except themselves.

"I have been expecting this," Alexandre Spaak said. "I knew that my theory was right—and I thought that once it was out, they might communicate with us."

"But who — where?" gasped Stokes. "There's no one else in this room—I mean, there isn't even a plant."

"No, but look out of the window," Spaak said. "Look at the trees lining both sides of the street—the trees with those curling leaves which look almost like heads—with tendrils waving from them, like antennae!"

They looked from the window, and it was true that the leaves on the trees did look like heads. They noticed that the antennae on the leaves of the nearest tree were all bent in the direction of their building, even though the wind was blowing away from it.

"*Ih dien buh tso!*" exclaimed Wang Chin Kwang.

"But it's impossible, really!" said Stokes. "That space ship, all of those records in the various languages, the clearing of the land here, everything!"

"Even if one does accept the idea of intelligent plants," Clyde Ellery said, "it does seem that some of the things which have happened would be beyond the ability of—say—a tree."

You are wrong, Earth-Man, came the thought. We have been the dominant life on this planet for many thousands of years, by your reckoning of time. Long ago, we knew there was intelligent life on the third planet of our sun, for we could catch an occasional thought, and we knew that your science was less advanced than our own. But we didn't realize until much later that it was animal life which was dominant there. At first, we found it hard to believe our senses."

"Then you did build the space ships?" Spaak asked.

Of course. It was not difficult. The Scarlet Diggers among us dug up the Llantl ore, even as you saw it done this morning. The Flame Tree processed it, and the Great Pounder hammered the hull into shape.

"But how did you power the ship? What were those crimson pellets which we saw pouring into the hopper in the ship?" Clyde Ellery asked.

The seeds of the Flame Tree. They are a more powerful explosive than anything known to your science.

"And the recordings?" asked Ellery.

The seed-bearing cones of our Repeater Tree. It took many trips of our first ship, for our message had to be made up of individual words from your languages. We could not communicate as we are now because of the distance.

"How did you know that we needed help?" Ellery asked.

We felt the waves of force set up by the explosion of what you called atomic energy. We had felt these waves before, coming from other planets, and each time all thoughts gradually died out on those planets and we knew that the intelligent life there had died. The last time it happened was on the fourth planet of our sun, a long time ago.

"And you were unable to save any of them?"

We could have saved them if we'd wished, came the thought.

"Which seems to bring us to the most important question of all," Clyde Ellery

said with a wry smile. "Why did you save us?"

THERE WAS a hesitation, and then the thought came to them: *The animal life on our planet died out because we could not, of course, permit it to feed on us. Yet, as you must know, we needed some form of animal life to maintain the balance of oxygen and carbon dioxide necessary to our lives. You seemed ideal for our purpose, for you could bring with you other animal life and your undeveloped plant life to feed yourselves.*

"And you did destroy the ships so that we could not leave?"

Of course.

For several minutes, the men looked silently at each other and considered that which they had received.

"It's hard to accept," Clyde Ellery said to the others, "but I suppose it's not too surprising when you stop to think about it. Even on Earth, the actual boundaries between animals and plants were artificial, as shown by our one-celled animal life which often couldn't be told from a unicell plant. It was just a question of where this evolutionary accident happened."

Not an accident, came the thought swiftly. *It was an accident that plants did not become dominant upon your planet. It is logical that we should be highest on the evolutionary scale. We are the only non-destructive form of life there is.*

"Oh, I say now!" protested Stokes.

Think, Earth-Men. Animals are in reality a parasite upon plant life, needing to destroy plants in order to exist. But we plants can build our carbohydrates and proteins out of inorganic salt and so need to destroy nothing. Can you do that, Earth-Men?

There was a moment of silence. Clyde Ellery turned to the others. "I suppose, in a way," he said, "they're right. Anyway, the important thing is that we are to live out our lives on a strange planet and must adapt ourselves to the conditions here. We mustn't forget that one of the things which led to the destruction of Earth was our attempt to believe that certain people—certain life forms, shall we say—were inferior to the rest of us. We must not let that happen again. . . . May I speak for all

of us?"

The other twelve men looked to each other and then nodded. Clyde Ellery turned to face the window, looking embarrassed.

"I hardly know the proper way of addressing an intelligent tree," he began, "but you may inform the rest of the life on this planet that we men of Earth have learned our lessons. We are quite prepared to treat you as our equals, and to cooperate with you to our fullest extent."

There was a long moment of silence; and, when the answering thought came, it seemed to be tinged with surprise and something which might have been humor:

You misunderstand. It was pointed out to you that all animal life exists as a parasite upon plant life. In our case, unfortunately, we need you parasites in order to live, but that does not imply special privileges. So long as you continue to supply us with carbon dioxide and do not attempt to destroy any of us, we are content to leave

you alone. But should you attempt to step out of your place, we will have to take measures. Those of you who have tried to enter our part of the planet have already experienced the weaker radiations of the one of us which you might call an energy tree. If you persist, you will be exposed to its full strength which will render you incapable of any action except what is needed for your survival. The thought softened. As your hosts—in a double sense, you might say—we do not like to make a point of your inferiority, but we are sure you will understand our present reaction if you will consider how you might have felt if the fleas which infested your bodies, the viruses in your bloodstreams, had offered you equality and cooperation.

The thought ceased. Outside, a heavy Venusian rain began, beating for a second upon the roof, before sliding to the ground and sinking to the level of thirsty roots.

Quietly the council bowed and departed.

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PORT LARIBEE with its score of Nisson huts, sealed against the lifeless atmosphere, the red dust and the cold, was a shabby piece of Earth dropped onto Mars.

There, Dave Kort was the first wilderness tramp to be remembered. In warm seasons he'd plod into Port Laribee, burdened by a pack that only the two-fifths-of-terrestrial gravity put within the range of

human muscles. He was a great, craggy old man, incredibly grimed and browned, his frostbites bandaged with dry Martian leaves tied on with their own fibre.

His snag-toothed grin was bemused and secret through the scratched plastic of his air-hood. He'd trade carved stones, bits of ancient metal, or oddities of plant and animal life for chewing tobacco, chocolate, heavily lined clothes, mending supplies, and new parts for his battered portable air-compressor.

He'd refuse a bath with disdain. And at last his rusty, monosyllabic speech would wax eloquent—comparatively.

"So long, fellas," he'd say. "See yuh around."

The equinoxial winds, heralding autumn, would moan thinly like the ghosts of the Martians wiped out in war those ages back. Dust would blur the horizon of that huge, arid triangle of sea-bottom called Syrtis Major—still the least sterile land on the Red Planet. At night the dry cold would dip to ninety below zero, Fahrenheit.

The specialists of Port Larabee, who watched the spinning wind-gauges, thermometers and barometers, and devoted monastic years to learning about Mars, said that they'd never see Dave Kort again.

But for three successive summers after he had quit his job as helper among them, he showed up, tattered, filthy, thinned to a scarecrow, but grinning.

Young Joe Dayton, fresh from Earth and full of Mars-wonder, asked him a stock question that third summer. The answer was laconic. "Oh—I know the country. I get along."

But at the fourth winter's end, Dave Kort did not return. No one ever saw him again, nor found among the ruins and the quiet pastel hues of Mars the dried thing that had been Kort. Somewhere drifting dust had buried it. No one had quite understood him in life. If any affection had been aimed at him, it was for a story, not a man. The man died but the story thrived.

Dave Kort had lived off this wilderness, alone and with sketchy artificial aids, for three Martian years—almost six by Earth reckoning. It was quite a feat. For one thing, the open air of Mars has a pressure of only one-ninth of the terrestrial, and

above ground it contains but a trace of oxygen.

How Kort had turned the trick was not completely inconceivable.

In making starch from carbon-dioxide and moisture under the action of sunlight, the green plantlife of Mars produces oxygen just as Earthly vegetation does. But instead of freezing it lavishly to the air, many of those Martian growths, hoarding the essentials of life on a dying world, compress their oxygen into cavities in stem and root and underground capsule, to support later a slow tissue-combustion like that of warm-blooded animals, thus protecting their vitals from cold and death.

Despoiling these stores of oxygen with a pointed metal pipette attached to a greedily sucking compressor, was a known means of emergency survival on Mars. Thus you could laboriously replenish the oxygen flasks for your air-hood. Simple—yes. But tedious, grinding, endless. Dayton could imagine.

Food and shelter were also necessary. But under thickets there is a five-foot depth of fallen vegetation, dry, felty, slow to decay in this climate, accumulating autumn after autumn for Martian centuries. In this carpet are those oxygen-holding capsules and roots, often broken, freeing their contents for the spongy surrounding material to hold. There too grow much green algae—simpler plants of the same function. There are the fruit and seed-pods of the surface growths, sheltered from cold. And there, the remaining animal life has retreated.

Fuzzy, tawny things that twitter; fat, mammal-like excavators that never care to see the sky, and many-jointed creatures that resemble Earthly ants only in their industry and communal skills. Above ground they build their small, transparent air-domes—bubblelike structures formed of hardened secretion from their jaws. There they shelter their special gardens and sun their young.

So, for a man able to borrow methods unlike his human heritage, there were ways to keep alive in the raw Martian wilds.

ONCE, Lorrington, the physician, said to Joe Dayton, "Kort must have burrowed, too—like a bear. Is that human? Of course the tip of the Syrtis Major tri-

angle here at Port Larabee is far north. But even if he could have gotten all the way to the tropics, the nights are still bitter. Even so, the big question is not how he lived like he did, but why?"

Yes, this was a point which Dayton had often wondered about, frowning with thick, dark brows, while his wide mouth smiled quizzically above a generous jaw. What had impelled Kort to a solitude far deeper than that of an old-time hermit or desert-rat? Had he been a great child lumbering by instinct through the misfit fogs of his mind to a place where he felt at peace?

Dayton favored another explanation as the main one.

"Why, Doc?" he said to Loring, as they played cards in the rec-hall. "The answer is in all of us, here. Or we would never have come to Mars. Where was there ever such a place of history, enigma, weird beauty, fascination to men? You can't be neutral. Hating Mars, you'd never stay. Half loving it, like most of us, you would—for a while. Loving it, you'd want a much closer look than is possible at Port Larabee, from which we sally forth like rubbernecks. Too bad that Mars is too rough for men, in the long run. Too bad that the Martians are extinct. Once there were even machines to maintain a better climate."

Other specialists were within hearing. They laughed, but they knew what Dayton meant. They'd seen the dun deserts, the great graven monoliths, dust scoured, the heaps of rust. Being here had the charm of a quest for ancient treasure, marked by the mood of death.

Parsons, the metallurgist, said: "Funny, but I remember Kort's posture—bent, just like the figures in the bas-reliefs. Though Martian skeletal structure was far different. That sounds as if part of Mars sneaked into Kort's body, doesn't it? Hell, there's no pseudo-science here! Plodding through dust, and at low gravity, you just naturally develop that posture as a habit. Now call me nuts."

"You're nuts, Parsons," Ketrich, the biologist, obliged.

Not many days later, Frank Terry and his son came to Port Larabee. Bringing a seven-year-old boy—a bright little guy named Will—to unlivable Mars, marked

the elder Terry at once as a screwball.

Was the mother dead or divorced? Was Terry a remittance man, exiled by his family? He seemed to have enjoyed the good things. . . Such curiosity was bad taste. Forget it.

"We like the sound of the place," Frank Terry explained. "We thought we'd take some photographs, really get friendly with the place. . ."

His listeners foresaw the withering of Terry's familiar enthusiasm, and his departure within a week. Except maybe Dayton guessed differently. The intellectual Terry was not much like Dave Kort. Yet perhaps a kinship showed in a certain expression, as if their natures had the same basis.

During the next Martian year, Dayton and the observatory crew saw the sporting-goods-store sheen vanish utterly from these two. They carried less and less equipment with each succeeding sally into the wilderness. Dried lichen, stuffed inside their airtight garments, soon served them as additional insulation against cold.

From their lengthening jaunts they brought back the usual relics—golden ornaments, carvings, bits of apparatus that had not weathered away. And the usual photographs of blue-green thickets, war-melted cities, domes celled like honeycombs, suggesting a larval stage in the life-cycle of the ancients, and of country littered with shattered crystal—much Martian land had once been roofed with clear quartz, against the harshening climate.

Frank Terry became bearded and battered. Will ceased to be a talkative, sociable youngster. Still devoted to his father, he turned shy, sullen, and alert in a new way.

He had a pet like an eight-inch caterpillar, though it was not that at all. It was warm-blooded, golden-furred, intelligent. It had seven beady eyes. It crept over the boy's shoulders, and down inside his garments, chirping eerily. Except for his father it was the only companion the boy wanted.

SO SUMMER ended, and the dark blue sky was marked by angry haze. Vitrac, chief scientist, said, "You're not going out again, are you, Terry?"

The kid gave the real answer, "Let's go,

Dad. I want to. Besides, Digger is home-sick."

The next morning, when the equinoctial storm closed in, the Terrys had vanished.

Joe Dayton led the search party. He found nothing. Mars is small but still vast. Its total surface equals all the land on Earth. Since the first men had come, not one in a thousand of its square miles had been touched by human boots.

Wandering explorers found Frank Terry's mummy late that spring, in a deep part of Syrtis Major, with old ocean salt around it. When they brought it to Port Larabee it was not completely dried out. So Terry must have survived through the winter.

The boy must surely be dead, too. But stories drifted back to the Port—of holes found in the felted soil, and of a small, heavily-burdened figure that scampered away at the sight of a man.

The general opinion was that this was pure romancing, to intrigue the tourists who came out that year in their bright, excited crowds, charmed by the Red Planet yet sheltered from it, equipped from shops recommended by the most debonaire of space wanderers—if such existed. Many were eager to stay, girls among them, bright-faced, sure, with the thrill in their eyes and voices. Ah, yes—but how long would they have lasted in this too rich and rough a strangeness?

Joe Dayton shrugged, sad that his opinion had to be so mean. There were soberer arrivals, too. Relatives of Port Larabee staff-members, mostly, Willowby's wife. Doc Lorrington's small daughter, Tillie, sent out for a visit. Among the tourists there were a few additional kids.

There was also the lost Frank Terry's elder brother, Dolph Terry, big, but prim beneath an easy smile. Also there was a Terry girl, Doran by name. She did not seem much like either of her brothers—the mystical wanderer, Frank Terry, nor the slightly stuffed-shirted Dolph. She was much younger than either of them, sun-browned, a bit puzzled at being on another world, not terribly pretty, but quick with good-humored shrugs and friendly chuckles whenever she could put aside her worry about her nephew.

Dayton had some belief in the tales from the wilderness. For he'd known young Will Terry. Besides, beneath the ineptness of kids, he recognized an adaptability beyond that of adults. So his work was cut out for him.

"After all, William was Frank's son," Dolph told Dayton. "Frank was—what he was. But my sister and I are here to see that the boy is located. Perhaps he can still have a normal childhood."

"We'll do what we can," Dayton replied, smiling crookedly to dampen the man's naive and assertive air.

For the last half of the long summer the search went on, many visitors took brief part, ranging well beyond the short tractor lines which encompassed the tourist's usual view of Mars.

Dolph Terry was dogged, but clumsy and irritable. His sister's rugged cheerfulness and interest in her surroundings, pleased Dayton.

Still, at the end—due as much as anything to sheer luck—it was Joe Dayton who captured Will Terry single-handed. It was almost autumn again. Joe flushed the scampering figure from a thicket. The boy's limp was to Dayton's advantage. He made a flying tackle, and the savage, grimy thing that was an eleven-year-old human, was fighting in his grasp.

His crooned words, finding their way through the thin texture of two air-hoods and the tenuous atmosphere between, did not soften the ferocity of those pale eyes. Such eyes can be like a blank mask, anyway—not unintelligent, but expressive of a different thought-plane.

"Easy, Will—easy, fella," Dayton said. "You couldn't last much longer out here. Your compressor must be nearly worn out."

Reassurance failed. "Lemme go!" the boy snarled blurredly, his speech rusted by solitude. Helped by his father, he had learned the tricks of survival, here. His dimmed past was so different from his present life that perhaps it seemed fearfully alien to him. As he bore the struggling boy to the tractor-vehicle, Dayton had the odd idea that a Martian, trapped by a man, might behave like this.

He recalled old yarns of boys raised by wolves or apes. Here was the same simple

loss of human ways—not by soul-migration, but the plain molding of habit by a bizarre environment.

AT THE Port Larabee hospital, Will Terry was at first least disturbed when left alone. But his whimpers at night reminded Dayton of the mewling of a Martian storm.

Dolph Terry cursed the waiting for an Earth-liner and the lack of a psychiatrist on Mars. Doran had no luck either at making friends with Will. Meanwhile the tempests began.

But Doran had an idea. Visitors were still awaiting passage home, among them children.

"Kids are kids, Joe," she told Dayton. "They may be able to reach Will. I talked it over with Doc Lorrington."

She was right. Gradually, then more quickly, the trapped-lynx glare faded from Will's eyes as he accepted the scared but fascinated companionship of the other youngsters in the hospital. He still had Digger. At last he let the others pet the fuzzy creature. The strangeness dimmed on both sides. Kid-brashness returned. Perhaps in the whimsy and fantasy of children, that could accept even the humanizing of beast and beetle, Will and his new friends found a common denominator for his life on Mars. He became a hero. Doran and Joe overheard some of his bragging.

"Sure I can work an air-compressor. Dad showed me. He used to say that Mars was home. I'm going back."

One morning Will was gone from the hospital. It came out that a hospital orderly had been diverted from watchfulness for a minute by other children. Two air-hoods, Mars-costumes, and compressors were gone. Also another boy named Danny Bryant.

The complaint of Lorrington's own tomboy eight-year-old completed the picture, "They didn't want me along!"

That day the savage wind moaned and the dust trains across the sky were tawny. Danny Bryant's folks were near hysteria. In all the foolishness of boys, there seemed nothing to equal this. Dolph Terry seemed to wonder blankly what sort of wily thing his brother had sired and trained. The visitors who had been charmed by Mars were

sullen and tense. The remaining kids were scared and solemn.

Doran's eyes were big with guilt and worry. "My idea caused the trouble, Joe," she told Dayton. "I've got to do something. I've got to follow Will and bring those boys back. I can live out there if Will can."

Dayton eyed her thoughtfully. It did not seem like such a tragedy to him, except of course, for the Bryants. He could understand this love for the wild Martian desert.

"Marry me, Doran, and we'll go together," Joe Dayton said.

So that was how it was. Dolph might think his whole family mad. Vitrac, chief scientist, who performed the ceremony, might think so too.

Joe and Doran ranged far ahead of the other searchers. Sometimes, in the hiss of the tempest, they thought they heard the weeping of a child. So they blundered through dust-drifts and murk, following what always proved a false lead.

The first night fell, a shrieking maelstrom of deathly cold, black as a pocket. An inflatable tent would have been a hardship for chill-stiffened fingers to set up in such a wind. They had no such burden. They burrowed beneath a thicket instead, into the layer of dry vegetation. For this there were no better tools than their heavy gloves. They dug deep, kicking the felty stuff behind them to plug the entrance, shutting out even the wail of the storm.

"The strangest honeymoon, ever!" Doran laughed.

Musty air was trapped around them, high in oxygen-content. To enrich it further they slashed hollow root-capsules with their knives. A little warmth was being generated in those roots. Above was the additional insulation and airseal of drifting dust.

Joe could breathe here without an air-hood, and hold his wife close in savage protection and regret and apology for the soft, man-made luxuries that should be, especially now, and were not. Instead they were in darkness, under Martian soil and dead leaves. A grub's paradise. Ancient beings of the Red Planet might have lived like this when the need arose, but it was an existence far off the beaten track for humans.

"When we get back I'll make it all up to you, Doran," Joe kept insisting.

THERE was a fear in him—of conforming for too long to the demands of this weird environment and of somehow losing a human heritage.

"I'm reading your mind, Joe," Doran laughed. "Don't worry. We both love the smell of coffee and bacon, too much. And music, and nice furniture, and walks in the park. We're not like Frank was, or young Will perhaps still is. No, this will make us want such things more—tie us tighter to Earth."

At dawn they blundered on. During their third night underground they were raided while they slept. Some chocolate bars and other food-concentrates disappeared. And a pencil of Joe's. Their two-way radio would no longer work. The chuckling, chirping inquisitive creatures of the Martian soil had crept into its case and broken it.

Thus the Daytons, out of contact with Port Larabee, did not hear how Danny Bryant staggered back, dazed, frost-bitten, and half smothered, to his parents' arms.

The storm ended after five days. The small sun blazed in the steely sky, which seemed as brittle as frozen air. There was a sharp lifting of mood. Go back to Port Larabee? The Daytons were tempted. But they had not yet found the boys. Besides, they were far afield. And with much of their supplies used up or stolen, the work of mere survival consumed time and energy and slowed travel. So it was almost as well to push on, wasn't it?

It seemed that they were always using pointed pipette and compressor to refill oxygen flasks from the hollow parts of vegetation. At dawn they collected hoarfrost crystals wrung from the arid atmosphere by the nocturnal cold, for drinking water. They ate underground fruit and the starchy pulps of certain roots. Wary of poison, they tasted untried things cautiously.

Mars hogs that tunnelled in an eternal blind search for food, were fair game in the darkness beneath the thicket leaf-carpet. Dayton had a tiny ato-stove that served for their meagre cooking.

Weeks passed and a strange life-pattern was set as the Daytons moved south, deeper

into broadening Syrtis Major. Maybe it was a bit warmer. Some paper-dry growths were still blue-green. More were brown from the winter dryness. Necessities were harder to find.

Sometimes, among the pastel-tinted thickets and low hills, there were patches of real Martian desert, red and lifeless.

Night followed exhausting day, and how welcome was the warmth of a burrow where one could nurse the frostbites acquired in the frigid dawn.

Several times footprints, large-booted but short-paced, led the Daytons on, only to be lost in rocky ground and lichen.

Twice Joe and Doran crossed the war-fused wrecks of huge cities. Fallen hot-house roofs littered the ruins. The piles of rust must have been irrigation pumps, spaceship ramps, climate-controlled apparatus.

In tower, storehouse, and avenue were the skeletons, with their odd, vertical ribs to house huge lungs.

Some devices still worked. Joe found a rod, probably of corrosion-resistant platinum. He pressed its stud and for an instant, before it became useless, it flashed fire that melted part of a fanciful wall-carving.

The struggle to survive harshened further. Once it was bitter water, oozing up from some deep irrigation pipe, that staved off death by thirst.

Several times oxygen was obtained only by lying prone over a teeming colony of the chitinous creatures whose instinct was to roof with a protecting airdome of gluten, anything that promised to be food. These Mars ants—ordinarily to be avoided—admitted air to the domes they built from their deepest buried tunnels and chambers.

OFTEN Joe looked at his wife, knowing that they both had changed. They were tattered, and a little like the bas-relief figures. They were Dave Kort, and Frank and Will Terry over again. Doran's teeth were very white in a face browned by sunshine filtered only by the rare Martian air. She was very thin, but there was an oblique charm in her features. Or had his very conceptions of beauty altered subtly, conforming to a now familiar environment?

Thinking back to Port Larabee and Earth

itself was often like recalling substanceless dreams, so different were such memories. And was the fading of revulsion for even the scurrying builders of the airdomes occasion for deeper fear because it represented the loss of another part of one's natural self?

Joe often worried. Others had been drawn to Mars too, eager to search out the mysteries of its past and people—all of this an intriguing fabric—but most Earthmen had the sense to realize in time that it was a graveyard world, unfit for humans. For to live the life of Mars you had to stop being human. Conditioning grimed into you like the red dust.

Nor was the trap just imaginary. The most frightening part was knowing that Doran was with child. Damn the pulsebeats of life that had no regard for circumstances!

Joe could be glad only that she remained human enough to be pettish and optimistic by turns.

"We can't get back, can we, Joe?" she'd say. "But maybe it'll be all right. It's a long time, yet."

Should they try to hole up, somewhere? That wasn't much good, either. Even in spring there wouldn't be enough resources in one place to sustain life for long. They had to keep moving. So when again they saw those boot-tracks, they felt free to follow.

Milder days came. At noon the temperature reached fifty degrees, F. The country brightened in pastel beauty after the vernal storms. There were gorgeous flowerlike growths. The tracks would vanish and appear again, seeming to mark no single trail but a series of excursions from somewhere among the hills to the south.

Once Doran and Joe heard a thin halloo or scream of defiance.

One of their two air-compressors quit beyond repair, making it twice the job to fill their oxygen flasks. This could be fatal, now.

Soon after they entered the hill-gorges there was a rock-fall, too close to be a thing of accident or coincidence. Later there was a swift-dying flicker that turned a spot of dust incandescent.

Later that afternoon, amid blue shadows

from towering monoliths, Joe met an attack as sudden and savage as a bobcat's. The creature sprang down at him from a ledge, clawing, kicking, striking with a knife. Joe had a bad time until his greater strength won.

Doran helped hold her nephew down. Will Terry was battered, hardened, scarred—scarcely recognizable with his teeth bared.

But, oddly, Joe knew just what to say to soothe him.

"Will, you can see that we're like you. Maybe we don't want to be, but we are, now. We can't drag you back again to Port Larabee."

The kid relaxed a little. His pale eyes turned puzzled but wary.

"About the other boy, Will—Danny Bryant?" Doran asked.

Will's lip curled. "He was weak and dumb," he said, fumbling with unused words. "I took him back long ago."

"You did fine, Will," Joe said. "Now what have you found here in the hills? You've been camping in one place for a while. Show us."

Joe had to use harsh command against the sullenness still in the boy. He did so bluntly, driven by grim hope and need.

Thus, before sunset, Doran and he found something they needed.

"Dad wanted such a place," the kid said, half-proudly.

IT WAS less than optimism promised—just a small, deep valley, pretty as a painting, but quietly forbidding, too. Joe had seen others almost like it. Martian growths clogged it, sprouting new blue-green leaves. The ruins were far less damaged than in the cities. There were countless little domes of the ant-creatures, indicating some underground water.

Nimble Will led the way downward and across the valley to a stout structure. It was not very unusual, just another relic in a region away from the fiercest path of war. Here might have been a last refuge, after the death of millions, the breakdown of machinery, and the rapid worsening of Martian climatic conditions. Crystal roofs lay shattered around the ornate central massiveness. But one wing with thicker glaze still stood—sealable.

Doran's eyes lighted as she and Joe and her nephew went into the deserted interior through the double doors of an airlock which some last, fleeing Martian had not closed.

Hardy wilderness plants had intruded into this hothouse but there still were troughs of soil, proving that this had been a garden sealed against cold, a place of fruit and flower.

"We might try to use this, Joe," Doran said, her voice thin in the heavy stillness.

He nodded. But his gratitude was tinged with scared and bitter overtones. He had tried to explore the central edifice, which must have been closed before the kid came, for the preservation of things inside was good. There were odd cylindrical cells, niches dark and dusty, cubicles piled with metal boxes. There was even what seemed a kind of machine-shop.

And there was a valve which, from the footprints in the dust, Will had tried to turn. Joe accomplished this now with a levering metal bar. Out in the dry hothouse pool a spout jetted rusty water.

"The underground storage cisterns are intact," Joe was soon explaining. "I prayed there'd be some."

Joe Dayton was grateful, yet not happy.

Grimly he began again the bitter toil of survival, the others helping. Like bizarre harvesters they tore up great bundles of roots and stalks and piled them inside the hothouse. Briefly the blue sunset shadows were long, over that weird, beautiful valley. Then the dusk came, and the faint frost haze of the always frigid nights.

"We'd better hurry before we freeze,"

Joe growled irritably. "When we get a lot of this stuff inside we'll tramp on it to break the oxygen-capsules. By morning there should be breathable atmosphere under this roof. Later, vegetation planted inside will keep it fresh."

Joe Dayton's mood now had a taint of despair. Forced to try to settle in this place, he felt more than ever trapped. More than ever he felt as if the souls of those con-dead beings depicted on carven walls that Phobos, the nearer moon, now illuminated, had been crowding into his human flesh and brain to push his own ego out. No, it was not witchcraft—it was simpler. Mars had

shaped its ancient inhabitants. Now it was working on Earthly material with the same, subtle, ruthless fingers.

When the task in the hothouse was finished, Joe went with his wife and nephew to burrow again away from the cold, and to eat and to sleep all in the manner which Mars compelled.

Joe wanted Doran and his child to keep their human ways. His child. That was his worst thought, now.

His mind pictured Will—tattered, wild, strange in thought and feeling. He had lived his first years on Earth. So how would it be with a child *born* on Mars? Joe cursed into his burry beard—curse the distance to Port Larabee which might as well not be there at all, so out of reach was it, so ineffectual, and so soon probably to be left deserted. Though bone weary, Joe did not sleep well that quiet night.

The next day, bathed and smiling, Doran still did not look quite Earthly to him. She was browned by Martian sun but the real difference that had come into her strong beauty was a thing of multiple detail, like the mark of persons used to the sea contrasted with those born to the plains—but deeper.

Scrubbed fairly clean, Will remained an urchin of Mars. Also scrubbed, and shaved, Joe felt more comfortable. Yet, he knew that basically this restored nothing.

A DAY later he was wandering around outside the hothouse, trying to plan needed agricultural projects, when a faint scrape of pebbles made him wheel warily.

"People! Rescue!" were his first eager thoughts. But then he saw that the three figures, two large and one small, were creatures attuned to Mars in the same way as himself, and as helpless.

Yet when old friends were recognized, in spite of the deep changes, Joe Dayton felt a joyous lift.

"Doc Lorrington!" he shouted. "Kettrich. And Tillie. Hey! Hey, Doran! Will! Come here!"

Doctor Lorrington's tomboy daughter, a bit younger than Will, showed a grinning dirty face through a battered air-hood and said "Hi."

"We were trying to follow you most of

the time, Dayton," Lorrying stammered. "We hoped to find you and Doran, and maybe the Terry boy. But our tractor broke down, and we had to live off the land. While we still had the vehicle there didn't seem much reason why Tillie shouldn't come along. We'd begun to give up hope of finding any of you alive."

Minutes were spent questioning and explaining. They all went into the sealed hot-house. Kettrich, the biologist, had even saved a little coffee.

"For a celebration, if we ever located any of you missing ones," he said to Joe and Doran.

Kettrich sighed and went on, "Chief Vitrac, Lorson, and a dozen others are the only old timers left at the Port. The others have all gone, with Dolph Terry and the tourists. Humans are about done with Mars though I suppose a few will trickle out here from time to time."

With contemplative relish Doran sipped coffee brewed with crudely filtered water on an ato-stove. She smiled like any woman who has her man, and has found a place and a purpose.

"Not for humans," she mused. "That's one way of putting it. Still, it doesn't necessarily mean us. Let's face facts," she continued. "A natural selection was going on all the time. Thousands of people left, disgusted. A very few stayed grimly, or got trapped. On Earth I never thought much about Mars, but now I've been here so long. We're different, perhaps proudly so. Oh, we still like the things that Earth-people like, maybe more than ever. But the Old Ones here also had their comforts. We have Earth flesh and bone, we'll never be like them that way, and I'm glad. You can either say that Terrans are supremely adaptable, or that we are no longer quite human, and that there are Martians again. Because one *has* to be that to really live here, doesn't he? Mars won't be left wasted and sad.

We're some of its first new people. Among the explorers there must be others. More and more will come. Gradually, through the centuries, we'll build Mars back toward what it was.

Dayton stared at his wife, then down at the ancient flagging, then at the others. Tillie tittered. She was as brown as Will Terry and almost as attached to the Red Planet. Around her mended glove a fuzzy creature twined, chirping. Will and Tillie were children of Mars.

DORAN'S assessment of a situation in plain talk took away its dread for Joe, giving his Mars-love a chance. He began to feel at home. "Is my wife talking sense?" he asked puzzledly.

Kettrich and Lorrying had both been fascinated by this world, too—willing to devote years to it.

"Well, we can still radio Port Larabee," Lorrying chuckled. "But in any case we're stuck here for a long time. Meanwhile, there's food growing wild around us. There's water. There are tools, machines, and supplies to puzzle out. And a valley to reclaim as a start. Beyond that, the job gets bigger and more interesting."

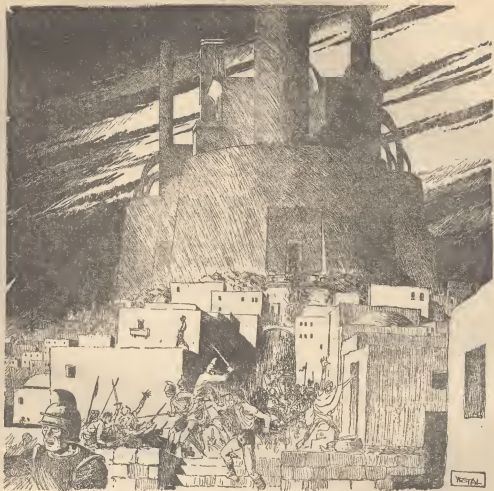
Before sunset that day, Joe and Doran Dayton walked alone in the valley. The Earth-star was already silvery in the dark blue west. The hills were dun-hued and peaceful. The domes of the Mars-ants gleamed. Fantastic spring flowers wavered in the wind. Small dust-whirls stirred among the ruins.

Joe Dayton looked forward, gladly now, to the birth of his child on the Red Planet.

"I hope that the Neo-Martians won't become so separate that they'll forget to be friends with Terrans," Doran mused.

Joe nodded as his arm crept around her waist. To him legendary history and present fact had merged. The wind's rustle was no longer the whisper of the dead past.





Tonight the Stars Revolt!

A Novel by GARDNER F. FOX

In the Black Pools he found the 50,000-year-lost wisdom of the Ancients. For a day Red Angus held victory in his sword-hand. But it was too short a glimpse, too elusive a thought to bolster the star-rabble against the Citadel's iron guard.

THE pools were like the gaping mouth of space itself, dark and fathomless, extending into bottomless wells, the depths of which the people of Karr could only guess. Some said the god Stasor dwelt in the glistening black depths. Others claimed

the emptiness was the hollow interior of the planet. None of them was right.

All men feared the pools. Only a man fifty thousand years old knew their incredible secret, and he lived in an invisible city. . . .

RED ANGUS fled like a frightened hound through the twisted alleys of the Lower City. Dim lamplight from the towering white walls of the Citadel threw glowing brilliance across his naked chest, glinted on the metal studs of his broad leather belt, and on the rippling muscles of his long legs. He skidded on a patch of slops, righted himself and dove for the darkness of an arched doorway. He drew back in the shadows, barely feeling the burn of the new brand on his shoulder that stamped him as a pirate.

Faintly, he heard the shouts and drumming feet of the Diktor's police as they ravened in the streets, hunting him. His heart thudded swiftly under the high arch of his ribcase. Red Angus smiled wryly.

He was a hunted space pirate, just free of the cell blocks below the palace. But he was more than that to the Diktor of Karr. He was a Karrvan noble who had gone bad, who had fled into space and established an eyrie on a wandering asteroid, who had set himself up as a one-man crusade against Stal Tay, ruler of Karr by the grace of the god Stasor.

"I'll find a way," the pirate swore in the shadows, listening to the shouts and running of the guards, the sharp, barking blasts of their heatguns.

There was a faint sound behind the thick oaken door. Angus moved his naked back, still welt and scarred, away from the damp wood. He clenched a big fist and stood silent, waiting.

He was a tall man, lean in the belly and wide about the shoulders. His mouth was thin but curved at the corners as though used to smiling. Close-cropped reddish hair gave his hard, tanned face a fiery look. Dark blue eyes glistened in the half-squint of the habitual spaceman.

The oaken door swung open. A cowed form stood in the darkness of the archway putting out a thin, old hand toward him. Where the cowl hung there was only a faint white dimness for a face.

"The Hierarch will see you, and save you, Red Angus," said the old man. "Come in. He hopes you'll listen to reason."

"The Hierarch?" snorted the lean man in disbelief. "He's hand in arm with Stal Tay. He'd land me back with my ankles

in a manacle chain."

The cowed man shook his head and whispered, "Hurry, hurry. There's no time to argue!"

A shout from a street less than sixty feet away decided the half-naked, winded Angus. He moved his shoulders in a bitter shrug and slid inside the door. The latch clicked on the door and a hand caught his. A voice, gentle with age, said softly, "Follow me."

TWO hundred feet from the door the walls began to glow. Angus looked at his guide and saw an old man, a member of the Hierarchy, a priestly cult of scientists who were honored and protected by the Diktor. Thirty years before, when the people of the Lower City had been ravaged by disease, they had stormed the block of buildings where the scientists worked.

They had wrecked machines and killed men.

The people of the Lower City were no better than savages and the pagan superstitions they boasted were encouraged by Stal Tay. It pleased the Diktor to believe that science was something only the rich deserved. So Stal Tay stepped in. He withdrew the scientists from the world of men and gave them a little world of their own that was called the Citadel.

Red Angus and the scientist went through corridors that bent and twisted in subtle fashion. It was quiet in this underground tunnel. Once Angus heard the subterranean rush of a hidden river seeking an outlet in the great Car Carolan Sea. Water condensed in oozing droplets on the cold stone walls.

Then they were going up handhewn stone steps toward an archway in which a thick, soot-blackened door was opening. Lights glared beyond the doorway in a large room with a high, groined ceiling.

He saw Tandor first, standing big and massive among the cowed priests, the wall light glinting from his bald head. They had had a time taking him from the Lower City, Angus saw. There were cut marks on him, and the blood here and there on his rough wool tunic had dried.

A tall man in a white cowl that was bordered with purple came toward them.

He said, "I saved your man from the Diktor's torturers. Money will do much in the Citadel. Even a pirate's first captain is not as valuable as a handful of *sestelins*."

Red Angus shrugged. "What do you want from me?"

The Hierarch nodded. "They told me you were a sensible man. Tonight I will free Tandor after you do me a service."

"What service?"

The Hierarch studied him carefully. "Kill the Diktor!"

Angus barked derisive laughter. "As well ask me to find the Book of Nard, I'd stand as much chance!"

"I may well ask that too, before you and I are through."

"Suppose I refuse?"

The Hierarch sighed. His black eyes glittered in the shadow of his cowl. "I'll smash your legs so you can't run, and let Stal Tay send his men for you. I'll put red-hot daggers in Tandor's eyes until he confesses your crimes. I—"

Angus scowled. "I thought the Diktor was your friend."

"He keeps us penned in the Citadel as his slaves. The scientific discoveries we make he claims as his own. He sent the diseases that the people blamed on the scientists."

Angus said, "I will kill him." But he thought to himself, I only play for time. It's promise or get my legs broken.

They led Angus to a little room where a cowed man waited for him with garments that were living reds and ochres, braided with gold and ornate with jewels. The scientist said coldly, "You are to impersonate the Ambassador of Nowk. He's red-headed and big with a scar on his face like your own."

The night air was crisp as Angus stepped with the cowed scientist through a stone gateway and into a long, sleek wheeler. He gathered his cloak of black sateenis about him and sank into the foamisal upholstery.

The cowed man whispered, "Everything is arranged. A woman dancer, Berylla by name, will dance for the Diktor. Right after that he plans to call you to his side to discuss the new trade agreement with Nowk. The dancer will give you the signal as she leaves. When you're summoned

strike at the Diktor's neck. A *divertissement* in the form of drunken revellers has been planned. In the excitement, you will be spirited away."

Angus touched the slim dagger at his side and nodded.

THE Diktor of Karr was a big man. He was solid in the shoulder and slim at the waist. His head was bald, and there was a jagged scar across his right temple. He sat on his jewelled throne and drummed restless fingers against the hand-carved arm.

Beside him sat a woman with sloe eyes and hair the color of a raven's wing. The thin stuff of her gown clung to supple haunches and proud breasts. She watched the new Ambassador from Nowk thread a path through the guests, unable to decide whether the man was ugly or ruggedly handsome. But he was big, with long, heavily-muscled arms and legs, and he had the look of a fighter.

Moana laughed softly. There was music in her voice and art in the manner of her movement as he drew closer. Her eyes ran over his big frame slowly, slumberously.

Red Angus came to a stop at the base of the dais and bowed low. He was a pirate but he had been in the great capitals of the Six Worlds.

"Your first visit to Karr?" smiled Stal Tay.

"The first, excellency."

"You like the court we keep?"

Red Angus knew of the taverns and swill-wet streets of the Lower City. He knew the people were slaves to the Hierarchy and to the Diktor, and his little coterie. Girls danced and pandered to the desires of the rich—if they did not, things were done to them in secret. He knew men grew old before their time, working to pay for the rare jewels that Moana and others like her flaunted.

But he murmured, "Plegasston of Nowk has said, 'For the good of the State, the greatest number of its people must enjoy the greatest amount of its highest rewards.' But Plegasston was a dreamer."

Moana gestured Angus to the golden chair beside her. She let her fingertips brush his hand as he took the seat. "Tell me about yourself, Ben Tal."

Angus grinned, "I'm a relative of his Eminence of Nowk. That explains all about me. But you. You're priestess to the god Stasor. You've gone into the black pool to face him. You've heard his pronouncements!"

Moana made a wry face and shrugged. Strains of music swept down from the fluted ceiling, diffused throughout the room. Her black eyes glowed. "Don't talk religion to me, Ben Tal. Take me in your arms and let us dance."

She was warm and fragrant, following his movements. Her dark eyes enticed as her hands fluttered from his arm to his shoulder to his neck. She made the moments fly. Seated with her at a table, letting her feed him playfully, he almost forgot his mission.

And then. . .

The room darkened. The hidden musicians made their stringed instruments dance with savage rhythm. And in a circle of golden light, her white flesh gleaming fitfully through a garment of diamonds, a woman swayed out onto the cleared floor. And Angus remembered. He was here to kill a man.

The woman in the service of the Hierarchs was a fireflame out there with the jeweled dress cloud of living rainbows swirling about her. She pirouetted, dipped, and leaped. She was motionless—and a storm of movement. She laughed. She wept. She taunted and cajoled. She was everything any woman ever was.

Angus saw her eyes darting, hunting him. They slid over his deep chest and long legs, square jaw and close-cropped red hair many times without recognition. Only toward the end, as the beam of light that spotlighted her dance touched him too, did she know him.

Her surprise made her stumble but she recovered swiftly. She whirled around the room, diamonds tinkling faintly to the stamping of her bare feet. She threw herself into the Dance of the Garland of Gems, and made it a living thing. When she came to the black curtains she posed for an instant, moved her arm in the agreed signal, and was gone.

The Diktor lifted a hand and gestured. Angus bowed to Moana and got to his

feet. With all the iron control he had developed on the lonely star-trails he fought to keep his hand from his knife-haft.

He bent to take his seat. Now his right hand was sheltered by his body and he put it on the dagger.

The thin blade whispered, coming out of the scabbard.

Red Angus leaned forward and thrust at the throat before him.

Four hands came out of midair and fastened to his wrist. They dragged him down by surprise and by the weight of their bodies. He went off his chair in a rolling fall, hitting the man to his left, toppling him backwards into Stal Tay.

MEN were shouting. A woman screamed. Angus brought his hard left fist up in a short arc, drove it into the stomach-muscles of the man on his right. The man grunted and went backwards. Red Angus stood free, his clean blade still naked in his hand.

He leaped for Stal Tay but other guards had come running. One threw himself before the dagger, both hands catching at it. Another hit the pirate across the legs with his hurtling body. A third man clawed himself to a position astride his back, hooking a hairy forearm under his chin. That was when the rest of them hit him.

Angus went back off his feet into a mass of struggling, cursing flesh. The guards yelled triumphantly but Red Angus had fought in tavern brawls in the Lower City, had wrestled with salt slavers on the desert dunes, had fought fights from Karr to Rimeron. He surged up. His fists went up and down. His right hand flashed out, closing on a guard's wrist. The guard screamed and fell away, moaning.

Angus breathed through distended nostrils, dancing back, fists thudding into rib and jaw. He fought to get room and he almost made it. But a guard left his feet in a wild dive before the pirate could brace himself. The man hit his knees and took them out from under him. Angus went down under a dozen leaping warriors. Grimy, blooded, Red Angus shook his head and gave up.

Moana was standing above him, laughing scorn through the queer, awed light in

her eyes. Her white breasts rose and fell swiftly under their scant covering. "The little dancer knew you, Ben Tal. I saw that. But she's never been out of Karr City. And this is your first visit. Who are you?"

Red Angus shrugged as the guardsmen lifted him to his feet and sat him roughly down in a chair before the Diktor. He made a wry face. There was a taste like bitter ashes dragging down the corners of his mouth. His belly quivered under the glistening cloth of his breeches. He seemed to hear the Hierarch's drawling voice, "If you fail, you die!"

The Diktor waved a hand. The guards lifted him, dragged him behind velvetene drapes and along a stone corridor, into a small room. The Diktor and Moana followed at his heels. It was the Diktor who turned the key in the lock.

"Who sent you?" the stocky ruler asked softly. "Who paid for my death? Tell me that, and you'll walk out of here a free man."

Red Angus shook his head. He met the hazel eyes of the Diktor grimly.

Stal Tay smiled. "Berylla the dancer knows you. I can always have her brought in, you know."

Moana had been walking around Angus. She came close, put a hand on the tunic that fitted his chest like a glove, and ripped. His heavily muscled shoulder was laid bare, where the inflamed interlocking triangles gleamed.

Moana cried out. "A pirate!"

The Diktor opened his eyes wide. "Of course. Now I know you. Red Angus. My men captured you a week ago. But how in Stasor's name did you get free?"

Angus said briefly, "Does it matter?"

"No." Stal Tay went and sat on a curved sigillis-chair and crossed his heavy legs. He drummed short, powerful fingers against the beethel-wood arm. "But the fact that you came back after getting free—that is important. You wouldn't have stayed in Karr City unless you had to. Who made you stay? Certainly you didn't hate me enough to risk your neck on such a long chance."

Angus grinned through the fear in him. "A-million people hate you, if you want to know. You keep the lower-city men and women in filthy poverty to buy you and

your kind jewels and luxury. You subsidize the Hierarchy, using their science to make your life easier and safer. Why deny those poor devils down below what you could give them so cheaply? Heat, Light. Power to operate a few machines. Let them taste something from life besides slops and sweaty clothes and hard beds."

"Oho," laughed the Diktor softly. "Plegasston of Nowk made a convert. What else did he say, Angus?"

"He said that government and science should serve the people, not enslave them. Doesn't Stasor teach that?"

MOANA laughed softly. Her black eyes taunted him. She said, "You want to hear what Stasor says about government and science and people, Angus the Red? Let me take him through the Veil, Eminence. Let the god himself tell the fool."

The Diktor smiled thinly, looking from man to woman. He shook his head. Moana moved to one side of the square-set ruler. Her black eyes bored straight at Angus. He tried to understand their expression.

The Diktor stood up. "I've used reason, Angus. You're a pirate. You've preyed on my space-caravans. You've stolen and plundered from me. I tell you again, I'll forgive all that—even reward you—if you tell me who sent you here this night."

The black eyes burned at him in Moana's pale white face. She touched her full upper lip with a red tongue-tip.

"If I could see Stasor," fumbled Angus, trying to fathom what Moana wanted him to say. When she nodded almost imperceptibly, he went on, "perhaps he could make me change my mind. If Stasor says I've been a fool, why then everything I've believed in will have gone smash. In that case I'd like to serve your Eminence."

Moana's black eyes laughed, silently applauding him. The Diktor scowled thoughtfully. He swung around on the girl. "Will you be his vow-companion?"

Angus knew what that meant. If he found a way to escape, the Diktor would stretch that lovely white body on the rack in place of his own, give those thighs and breasts and face to the red-hot pincers, the nails, the barked hooks. He would never let her suffer that fate.

Maybe the Diktor knew that. He smiled a little as Moana promised. He went, without another glance at Angus.

Moana said softly, "It was all I could do, Red Angus. He would have taken you to the Pits tonight if I hadn't delayed it."

"You don't owe me anything," he told her crisply.

"I do, though. My brother angered the Diktor a year ago. He was sent to the salt marshes of Ptixt. You raided the caravan that carried him and set him free. My brother lives safely hidden today, in one of your pirate cities. I remember that, Angus. Sometimes good deeds do pay off. What does Plegasston say about that?"

She went past him and through the doorway.

He followed her swaying body along the drape-hung corridors, into small rooms and past oak-beamed doors. She came to a blank wall, reached up and pressed pink fingertips against a rose-red stone.

"The whorls at the tips of my fingers set off a light-switch mechanism within the stone," she explained. "It's better than any key."

Somewhere an engine hummed faintly and the rock wall began to turn. It swung aside to reveal a narrow corridor leading downwards. The walls were coated with a luminescent blueness that glowed brightly, lighting the way.

Angus saw the pool long before he came to it. A round metal collar bordered the glistening blackness, that seemed to press upward as though striving to burst free of whatever held it. It shimmered and quivered. It pulsed and throbbed with something close to life itself.

Angus came to a stop, staring at it. He put out a hand and thrust it into the darkness. It felt light, biting, and he thought it might taste like heady wine.

Moana took his other hand. She whispered, "Come," and stepped down into the pool.

The darkness swam all around Angus. He felt it on his skin, in the pores of his arms and hands and legs. It made him giddy, so that he wanted to laugh. It was like walking on air, to stride in this thing.

They went down into the pool and stood in a strange space, where there was only

blackness, unrelieved by light. It was cold. Faintly, Angus could hear what he thought was music.

"Will yourself ahead," he heard a musical voice whisper.

He floated effortlessly.

"Where are we?" he wondered aloud.

"Out of space. Out of time. In the abode of the god. Soon now, we shall see Stasor."

A bright point of red glowed faintly, as a pinhead might gleam when heated in a fire. It grew swiftly to the size of a fist, to the size of a head.

The red glow burst, and sent streamers of flame out into the darkness.

Where the red had been was Stasor.

HIS FACE floated in a white mist, ancient and wise and sorrowful. The dimly veined lids were shut. The forehead was high, rounded, surmounted by snowy hair. On either side of the great hawk-nose, high cheekbones protruded. The eyelids quivered, slowly arose.

Angus stared dumbly into living wisdom. He wondered deep inside him how old Stasor must be, to know what those eyes knew; how many worlds he must have gazed on, how many peoples he must have seen grow to statehood, to degeneracy, to death.

"You entered the pool. I felt your emanations. What do you wish?"

Moana said, "I am your priestess, Stasor. I have brought a man to see you."

"Let the man speak."

Angus wet his lips. He scowled, trying to find words. He mumbled, "I've been sentenced to die for attempting to kill the Diktor of Karr. He's an evil man."

"What is evil, my son? Is a man bad because he opposes your will?"

Angus growled, "He's a curse to his race. He sends disease and death on his people when they disobey him. He keeps improvement from them. He makes them slaves when they might be gods."

"That is your belief. What says the Book of Nard?"

Moana whispered, "The Book of Nard is lost, High One."

Stasor was silent a long time. He said, finally, "The Book must be found. In it are the secrets of the Elder Race. Go to the

City of the Ancients. There you will find the Book."

"No one today knows where the City is, either. It is lost, with all the secrets of the Elder Race."

"The City lies across the Car. Carolan Sea, through the Land of Living Flame. Go there."

The lips closed. The eyelids shut. Swiftly the old face faded into nothingness. The blackness came and pressed around them.

Angus turned slowly, as in a dream. Still in that dreamlike trance he found himself staring at three tall, cowled forms that stood like sentinels.

Moana screamed.

One of the cowled figures lifted an arm and gestured assurance. "There is no cause for fear. The Hierarch sent us to bring you before him."

Moana shuddered. Angus felt her cold hand seeking his, trying to hide itself in his palm. Hand in hand they willed themselves after the cowled forms. They swam bodily through the blackness, moving eerily, without muscular movement.

A round curtain of shimmering bluish motes ahead of them was like a glowing patch in the darkness. One of the cowled forms turned and waited. He said, "Another pool, Moana. The pool of the Hierarchy. We, too, know the way into this world."

"What is the blackness?" wondered Angus.

"What man knows? It was formed and built by the Elder Ones before they went on."

They were in the pool, passing upward through its queer surface. It sizzled and bubbled all around them, tingling on the skin.

They passed the pool and stood in a low-ceilinged, bare room.

A cowled man opened a door for them and stood aside.

The Hierarch sat in a curved chair ornate with gold edgings. His pale, ascetic face gloomed from the shadow of his big cowl. He stared at them, a thin smile touching his lips. He stared so long that Angus asked impatiently, "What do you want with us? Tandor, is he free?"

Moana gasped, sudden understanding

waking her mind. The Hierarch brushed her with his eyes and sighed.

"Tandor is free. I fulfill my promises. You tried and failed, yet you tried. Now—"

He paused, fingertips pressed together, brooding down at Angus.

"Many thousands of eons ago, before our race came into existence, all Karr belonged to the Elder Race. It lived a long time on this world, before it went on."

Angus grinned, "Your priest said that. You and he mean—"

The Hierarch spoke patiently, as if lecturing a child. "It did not die out. It went on, to another plane of existence. Everything must progress. That is the immutable law of nature. The First Race progressed, far beyond our understanding, beyond the natural laws as we know them. They exist today—somewhere outside.

"Stasor, now. Take him, for instance." The Hierarch flicked burning black eyes at Moana. "Some think he is a god. He is a member of the Elder Race."

Moana said harshly. "Blaphemy! You speak blasphemy of Stasor."

The Hierarch shrugged. "I tell you Stasor is a four-plane man, one not bound by our three dimensions. He and his kind have gone on to that other world. They left behind them rules to guide those who came after them. They left the pools. They were a great race, the Elders, and the black pools are their greatest discovery. Those rules they gave us are contained in the Book of Nard, I want that book!"

"Why?"

The Hierarch smiled gently. "With the secrets of the Elders at my fingertips do you think the Diktor could keep us penned here in the Citadel?"

A faint hope burned in Angus' chest. "You mean, you wouldn't be cloistered any more? That you'd give your science to the people and help them up?"

"Pah!" snapped the Hierarch. "The people? Pigs! They wallow in their filth and love it." His burning black eyes glittered fanatically. "No, I mean I—and not the Diktor—will rule all Karr!"

He is mad, too, thought Angus. He and the Diktor—mad with the lust for power. If the Diktor dies and the Hierarch rules the people will change a bootheel for a

mortar and pestle. *Even the stars must revolt against that.*

II

THE street was dark, except for the moonlight shining faintly through the serrated rooftops, and reflected grey and dismal from the rounded edges of the cobblestones. Angus and a cowed man made a short dash, ran into the shadows, and trotted at a slow pace.

Above them a sign creaked on rusty chains. Angus looked behind at the huge stone bulk of the Citadel where it rose from solid rock, wall piled on wall, and turret on tower, and battlement upon bastion. Beyond the Citadel the thin, delicate spires of the palaces towered above the clean, fragrantly perfumed Upper City. Up above, there was no swill. There was no stench of rotting garbage. The patricians did not know what roast derstite looked like on a greasy platter, or how broiled colob smelled or what awful stuff the vintners sold in the big Mart.

Angus said, "I still don't see why the Hierarch bothers sending me after the Book. He has a lot of scientists who'd do a better job of finding it."

The lips of the man twisted in the darkness of the cowl. "How do you think the Diktor keeps us penned in the Citadel, red-man? He has spectragrams of each of us in his palace, attached to central controls. Every once in a while he has his captains check on our locations. When the vibratory beams touch us, they reflect our spectrums on the visi-screens. If one of us is out of place—beyond the limits of Karr City, that is—he sends a patrol to find and capture us. We lost several good men that way before we grew resigned. Once a scientist is captured by the Diktor he is destroyed. Instantly."

"Isn't there anyone else to help you?"

The scientist showed his disdain by a twitch of the lips. "Who? One of the people? They'd run so fast to betray us a theto-hound couldn't catch them. They hate the Diktor, but I think they hate us more."

Behind them the shadow of a man with a zigzag scar on his face disengaged himself from beneath an overhanging cornice and

silently followed.

Angus and the scientist went through the narrow streets, down stone steps and across a great square. To one side the red lanterns of the Spotted Stag tavern glowed and the shouts and roistering laughter of men mingled with the shrill, excited laughter of a woman.

The scientist glanced about him nervously, wet his lips with his tongue. "I don't like this section. It's too near the wharves. There are other rats than the four-legged kind."

A blackish, blunt object in the big hand of a half-naked man bounced from the skull of the cowed one. Angus went forward, left hand hooking. He caught the big man on the side of the mouth and drove his head sideways. His right fist was crossing as his left landed. He hit the man with his right hand and the man went backwards into a brick wall.

"Easy, Angus," growled a voice in back of him, with a hint of laughter in it.

Angus whirled, teeth bared. When he saw the bald head of the giant in front of him he laughed harshly.

"By the gods! Tandor. The Hierarch did keep his promise, then!"

"We heard you'd missed killing that scum that lives in the palace by an inch. Tsk! The Hierarch felt that, with luck, Stal Tay would be dead by now. He let me go, yes. As soon as he learned that you and that priestess were in the black pool."

Angus bent and threw back the cowl of the scientist. There was a swelling lump on the back of his head. Angus said, "I thought you broke his skull when you hit him." He looked at the man stirring against the brick wall. "Sorry, friend. I thought you a footpad."

"Tandor told me you were fast. He wasn't lying." The man grinned ruefully, feeling his jaw.

Tandor shouldered Angus aside and picked up the cowed man. He led the way up through the streets, the limp man's legs and arms dangling inertly. Tandor asked, "Where was he taking you?"

"To a hidden globe-ship. I'm supposed to find the Book of Nard. The Hierarch is holding Moana as hostage for my success."

Tandor whistled softly, eyes round. "He exchanged me for the girl. A smart man, the High Priest!"

LAUGHTER came out at them from the illy-lighted interior of the tavern together with the dry smell of wine and the stench of sweating flesh. Tandor kicked the oak door open and went along the wall with his burden. A girl with a rag around her middle ran for Angus, tipsily pressing wet lips to his. She threw up a wooden goblet, the red wine splashing over its rim, crying, "The Anvil! To Red Angus the Anvil—the only friend we have!"

The roar echoed in his ears as Angus stepped into the little side room. Tandor kicked a chair toward Angus, reaching for a wooden pitcher. He growled, "Are you going hunting for the Book?"

Angus stretched out his legs and dragged a full goblet toward him. He stared at the dark liquor. Finally he said, "Yes, I'm going."

"Why?"

"Because I've seen the way they live in the Upper City. I've seen the life they lead and I've seen the life those people out there in the big room lead."

Tandor made a rumbling sound in his throat. "You don't think they'll appreciate your changing it, do you?"

Angus looked thoughtful. He smiled, "I know what our race is heading toward, now. We will be like Stasor—the man behind the veil—eventually. The longer the Diktor stays in power, and others like him, the longer will the rest of us be kept from that goal."

Tandor grinned like a wolf. "Some men like to be martyrs. It's a weakness of the brain." He scowled, and brought the flat of his ham-like hand down on the wooden tabletop. "I say it's madness. Let the Hierarchy and the Diktor slit each other's throats. Let's go back to the star trails, Angus. Out where a man can breathe and stretch himself."

Angus shook his head. "Take the ship yourself. Go raiding, if you want. I stay. I want to answer a question."

"What question?"

"Why is science?"

"Why is—? You're crazy, now. I know

it. Of all the stupid questions. Science is an art designed to better the life standards of the patrician class. There. That answer you?"

"I say science is something that should benefit all. Why do we have torches while the hierarchy and the patricians use illuminating lamps and incandescent walls? Why don't we have stoves instead of hearths or electrifiers instead of percussion guns?"

Tandor smirked. "It's safer."

Angus got to his feet and walked about the smoky, oak-beamed room. In the reddish light his naked chest and thickly muscled arms seemed coated with crimson. The short crop of red hair on his rounded, square-jawed skull added to the illusion. He planted his hands on his hips and stood in front of his lieutenant.

"I turned pirate when the last Diktor executed my father for leniency with his servants. The Diktor said he was undermining governmental discipline. I took my mother and fled into space. I found a safe spot on Yassinan. I built a pirate empire with your help. I'd offer up all that—all the wealth we've amassed in Yassinan—to smash the setup here!"

Tandor spat on his hand and rubbed his palm dry on the flat of his bald dome. He said drily, "You make me mad, Angus. You aren't satisfied with things. Always you have to change them. Isn't life full enough for you now?"

Angus ignored him. "If I could get the Book of Nard and free Moana and take her away to safety we might stand a chance. If we could develop science undisturbed on Yassinan we could do it."

"Why fret about Moana?"

"She became my vow-companion. You know what that means to somebody like the Diktor." Angus slapped his broad leather belt decisively. "I'll do it. I'll go in his globe-ship and try and find the Book. Tandor, you stay here. Raise men to fight for us."

The big man with the bald head nodded gloomily. He poured wine from the wooden tankard, downed the brimming goblet in one long gulp. He wiped his lips on the palm of his hand and rubbed it dry on his bald head. "I hear you. I think you're mad but I hear you. What are you going to do

with that?"

His thumb jerked at the limp scientist in the long cowed robe. Angus shrugged. "He'll come around. When he does I'll pretend I've fought off his assailant. Meanwhile, you find out which globe-ship he means to give me. Can you do that?"

The big man rumbled, "Tandor can do anything. I'll find out without leaving the room." He lifted his voice and bellowed. When the door opened and a red face peered in, Tandor grinned, "Find that wharf-rat Plisket and send him in here."

Plisket limped in, grinning at Angus, bobbing his head. His eyes opened when he heard what Tandor wanted. He chuckled, "The hierarchy plot like a pack of fools. Everybody outside the Citadel hates them. It happens I hate the Diktor more. They gave me gold to build a ship."

"The Skimmer?" asked Tandor. "That wonder-boat you were telling me about?"

"It is a wonder boat. It incorporates the—"

"Never mind the details," rapped Angus, leaning his palms on the table. "Is that the boat the hierarchy want me to use?"

"It must be. It's the only one unchartered. And Angus—if you are to control it—remember that it will submerge. And it has four speeds, two more than . . ."

Tandor slapped the table with his palm, making the goblets bounce. "Enough, enough. Plisket, your tongue wags like a hound's tail. Angus, are you ready?"

Angus stretched his tall, heavily shouldered body. He went and bent his lean height over the shallow-breathing scientist and swung him up in a fireman's hitch. He walked firmly, steadily, as he headed for the oaken door.

THE man with the zigzag scar on his cheek drew back into the darkness of a jutting second storey as a door creaked open down the street. His eyes glittered, watching Angus emerge with a cowed body atop a shoulder. The hidden man touched a glittering knob strapped to his wrist, turned the knob and lifted it to his mouth.

Angus did not see him, did not hear him whisper into the voxbeamer. He heaved up, settling the body on his shoulder. He began to trot, with space-devouring strides. He

went by the spot where Tandor's bully had struck down the cowed man. He went ten paces beyond it, and halted. He lowered the man to the ground and began to shake him.

"Wake up . . . he didn't hit you that hard. Come on. Man, stir yourself . . . that's better . . . see me, do you? Who am I? Angus. Good. You're better? All right . . . on your feet . . . here, I'll give you a hand."

The scientist teetered weakly, tried to smile. "I told you it was a place for rats. What happened?"

"I beat him off. I carried you a bit, thinking he might come back. We've lost some time."

"Sorry. I'll make a report to the Hierarchy. He'll be glad to know you didn't run out on him."

Red Angus clipped coldly, "I wouldn't leave Moana to that Diktor devil. The Hierarchy knows that."

The cowed man nodded. "Just the same, I'll tell him. I like you, Angus. If I can ever help you, remember Thordad."

"You're all right? Sure you can go on?"

"I can go on. Hurry. Never mind me. I'll make it."

THEY saw the towering ball of the globe-ship as they broke from the squat buildings framing the square at the waterfront. It was a ball of golden brilliance, riding the slight sea-swell despite its bulk, occasionally rubbing against the soft snubbers attached to the dock. In the moonlight it loomed majestic and awe-inspiring above the wet, rounded stones of the quay. Its soft *slip-slop* motion on the waves made it seem alive in the salt-laden breeze moving in from the sea.

The scientist halted. "I leave you here. You know how to get to the Flaming Land? Good."

Thordad held out his bony hand. Angus grinned and clasped it. He chuckled, "Tell the Hierarchy to dust off a shelf in his Literaturum. I'll fill it with the Book of Nard."

Thordad smiled, turned on a heel and strode off into the darkness of an alleyway. Angus went on, eyes gleaming up at the hulk of the ship. He heard the wind whistling in the rooftops, and across the flat

stretch of the square. With eyes and ears already occupied, he did not hear the sobbed cry Thordad managed as a hand closed on his throat, nor did he see the dagger dripping crimson in the hand of the man with the zigzag scar, rising to fall again and again in Thordad's body.

Angus went across the gangplank into the curved port. He pressed a stud and the door slid into place. Lights sprang to full illumination, revealing shimmering metal beams and cross-braces, glittering crimson floor, and long banks of control panels. Glowing tubes, slowly warming, flooded the gigantic room with a soft blue color.

Angus studied the meters. He drew down a red-handled lever. Far below the plastic-sheltered engines throbbed, roared their power. Slowly the great hull of the globe-ship began to revolve, circling the inner ball. The fine margin of air-space, charged with electronically regulated magnets, made a soft, swooshing sound as the outer ball rotated faster. The inner ball, a gigantic gyroscope set in a magnetic field, held steady, while the outer globe swirled rapidly.

The globe-ship seemed a huge ball that some giant's hand was shoving through the water. It flipped water from it as it raced. Its bulk, designed for the minimum amount of friction in water, danced across the waves with terrific speed.

Angus watched the great bulk of swaying, restless water ahead of him, saw combers flee by, watched huge swells come and go, split by the globular hull. He flipped over the light-map and studied his progress, making changes in the directional needle.

He headed out across the heaving Car Carolan Sea toward the Flaming Lands, where no living man had ever gone before.

THE Diktor turned from a contemplation of the serried bands of light glistening across the beaded spectragraph screen. A young attendant in golden jacket and breeches touched a button at his command and the screen went dead.

The drapes over the arched doorway at the end of the room billowed aside as an officer entered, clicked heels and bowed. His

voice was hoarse. "Teoman has returned, Eminence. He bears news of the pirate."

The Diktor came striding across the floor, sweeping his cloak behind him with a short, thickly muscled arm. He gestured peremptorily and the billowing curtains lifted. A man with a zigzag scar on his cheek bobbed his head up and down, sidling into the room.

"The pirate has gone in a globe-ship across the Car Carolan Sea, Highest One. A scientist of the Dragon Class was assisting him. I daggered the scientist but I could not reach Angus in time."

The Diktor bit his lip. "Moana?"

The spy shook his sparsely-haired head. "No sign of her, Eminence. She was not with him."

The Diktor tossed a bag of coins to Teoman, gestured the man out. He snapped an order and went striding back and forth across the room as the officer hurried out.

The officer came back with two red-clad attendants who wheeled a squat engine, bulbs and gears locked inside a transparent jacket, before them. High on the gleaming metal top of the machine stood a vox-phone.

The Diktor bent and put his lips to the vox-phone. He said irritably, "Subject: the Car Carolan Sea and adjacent territories. Query: What, if anything, of scientific value is reputedly found in that region?"

There was a faint hum of the gears and pistons. A soft, gentle voice replied, "The flaming Land and the Desert of Dead White Stones border the Car Carolan Sea to the west. To the east is the continent of Karr Major. To the south the ice floes that are barren. To the north, the polar regions. Beyond the Flaming Land is an inland sea fed underground by waters from the Car Carolan. Beyond that sea lies the desert. It is an uninhabited land. There is nothing of scientific import there aside from the volcanic region of the Flaming Land."

The machine clicked and died. The Diktor sighed. He would have to go and see Stasor. He did not want to do that because he had a feeling that the members of the Elder Race did not approve of him and his methods.

EVEN far out at sea Angus felt the heat coming toward him in surging waves.

Mists, formed from water heated to the boiling point, rose like a white pall to shelter the Flaming Lands from his eyes. But here and there, through a breeze-made rift, he could see huge tongues of fire, red and sullen, rising from the ground.

Angus drove the globe-ship into the white fog. Gigantic bubbles broke under it, flung mists and steam up over the ship. Inside the glober the heat was fierce.

Angus was clammy with the sweat running down his cheeks and ribs. It was sapping his energies. When the controls started to blur in his eyes he knew he had enough. His fingers touched the warm control lever and threw it forward.

He fled miles from the mist and slowed to a stop, riding the ocean's swell. He muttered, "I'm through. Finished. I can't go over and I can't go under . . . or can I? Didn't Plisket say something about that? Wait . . . wait . . . sure! He said this thing will submerge."

Angus got up and crossed the room. There was a small literaturum inset in the metal wall. He ran his eyes over titles, reached up and brought down a thick book on geophysiology.

He bent, consulting pages on subterranean oceanology. His finger pointed out a paragraph. "From the Car Carolan Sea an underground river feeds the inland sea that lies between the Flaming Lands and the Desert of Dead White Stones."

It took him a long time, hunting blindly in the heated water all around him. He went deep, trundling across the jagged ocean bottom. The oxygenators were laboring when he found the great dark orifice looming ahead in his sea-lights.

It was close work, maneuvering the glober through the sea-tunnel. All around was the muted booming of volcanic fires sending up hot jets of molten lava, flame and ashes. Water swirled, black and thickish, past the rounded hull.

When the water lightened, he knew they were out of the tunnel. Angus sent the glober rocketing upward. It burst through the water into clear air. The Flaming Lands lay behind. Ahead, across the bluish expanse that was the inland sea, lay a vast stretch of sand and rock.

Angus anchored the globe-ship. He dove

overboard and swam to the whitish sands. The sun was warm above and the hot sand bit through his leather boots. Angus threw a big canteen across his shoulder and fastened a small packet of food tablets around his waist.

He walked for two days and a night before he found the half-sunken road that arched across the desert. The road ended four days later, in the barrens. His water was gone and the leathern pocket that had held food tablets was empty.

"I can't turn back," he thought. "I've been gone a whole week from the inland sea."

Angus turned and stumbled on. The sun beat down on his naked shoulders, on the remnants of the sun-worn rags about his middle. With each puff of sand his feet kicked up, something went out of his spirit.

Angus saw a brown rock uplifting its jagged tip from the sand. He ran awkwardly toward it, hoping that from its top he might see the spires of a distant, nebulous city. But there was only sand and more twisted, curving dunes, and the faint azure tint of the horizon.

He stood on the naked finger of rock and swore. He invoked the olden gods—the fecund Ashtal, goddess of love and sex; Grom who fought with warriors; Jethad who loved the wise. He called on them for their attention and he cursed them, upwards and down, forward and back.

In his rage he took the empty canteen and hurled it.

Choking, he broke off in mid-curse.

The canteen had disappeared in mid-air!

THE Hierarch made fists out of his taloned hands. The cowed man, bent before his carven chair, trembled. The Hierarch whispered, "Are you sure?"

"We followed his spectragraph in the screen, Excellency. We followed it until it disappeared!"

The black orbs in the thin white face of the chief scientist burned with fanatical ardor. Through thin lips he rasped, "He tricked me. He had those pirates of his pick him up when he was safely out of my hands."

"He went through the Flaming Lands," quavered the cowed man. "We saw him do

that. Would he go to all that trouble to be picked up in the desert? He could have escaped from the Car Carolan Sea."

"Evidence of his cunning. He wanted to make sure he was a good distance away from the power of the Diktor."

"The Diktor?"

"You fool! I'm going to the Diktor and turn Moana over to his torturers. I'll tell him Angus planned with Moana to kill him. Hai. The torturers will work over her a long time, I think. When Angus hears of that . . ."

The Hierarch brooded. He smiled, "I might even turn that into a trap for him. When he returns, having heard what has happened to Moana, I'll be waiting for him."

Angus slid down from the rock with his heart in his mouth. *The canteen flew out into the air*, he thought. *It went high, and as it came down it disappeared!*

There was something just ahead of him. Perhaps a force field hidden in the shifting and eddying mists rising from the desert lands.

If he could find the canteen and discover what made it invisible . . .

Angus was weak. His knees crumpled as he tried to take a forward step. He summoned the muscles and the nerves of his big, gaunt body. He went forward one step, then two.

At the third step he fell. He put out his hands.

They parted the grey mists in front of him but did not break his fall. His naked knees hit rounded stone and then his palms went out and touched the worn pavings of a city street.

"Gods!" the pirate whispered, lifting his head, blue eyes burning like coals in his tanned face.

The gray mists shifted, fading. From their wisps, as though like the flesh of a naked woman revealed by smoky veils, shone queerly rounded and smoothly curved walls of amaranthine and ocher, red and jonquil yellow. Here and there a dome of pearly champagne stood tipped with a knob of vermilion. The houses on the edge of the city were low, seeming to rise higher and higher toward the center where a tall,

slender building reared its spire.

Red Angus drew a deep breath, running his hands down the ridged muscles of his thighs. He turned and stared behind him where the hot sands ought to be. He saw only gray mists, shifting and shimmering.

Angus went down the street, past empty-windowed buildings, across bare intersections, his foot-falls loud in the stillness of the dead city.

He walked until the entrance to the central tower was in front of him. Crested with heraldic devices—Red Angus recognized the flame-eyed Stallion of forgotten Shallar and the rampant Dragon of Domeer—the wide door was a glittering mass of emeralds embedded in carvings so delicate they seemed sheared from paper.

The doors opened at a touch, revealing red-and-yellow squares of metal stretching forward beneath a glittering dome of translucent jade. In the center of the hall stood a low metal rim about a bubble of grayish green iridescence. He went toward the rim, bent over and stared down.

"One of the black pools!" whispered Angus.

Through the luminescent bubble he could see only blackness, a jet nothingness that seemed alive.

A STEP sounded on the metal flagging behind him.

Angus whirled.

A man stood there, leaning on a bent staff, smiling gently. He was clad in a loose woolen garment, white as falling snow. His arms and legs were bare and brown. His face, though lined and creased, seemed almost youthful.

"I have waited many years," he said softly, "and no one ever came. Now—at last—there is someone who has found the city. Welcome. I bid you welcome to the Tower of the Ancients!"

"Stasor!" cried Angus in sudden recognition.

"The Stasor you know, yes. One of my race is chosen to spend a hundred years as Guardian of the City, to wait for any who might come to seek its treasures. You are the first who ever found it."

Angus said, "A lifetime of loneliness. Are we worth it?"

The old man laughed. "We do not die—not as your race knows death. It's one of our attainments. Like the blackness where you first saw me."

"The blackness?" Angus turned, stared down at the metal collar encasing the jet black pool. "What is it? It must be all over the planet. No one knows what the pool is."

"It is the greatest product of my race. Many eons ago a scientist discovered that an atom may be split to create ravening energy. For years the mightiest scientists of the Elders studied that fact. Eventually they built machines that could house such awful power. Finally, after many centuries, they developed the pools.

"The pools are nothing more than that atomic radiation—sheer energy—bottled up in vast chambers lined with *stalabasil*. Ready for use at any time.

"In the early days men died from such radioactivity. As time went on and we handled it more and more, our bodies evolved, so that the painful burns that caused death became as mere tinglings along the nerve-ends. Your own race, that evolved on Karr after the Elders went on, is also immune to it."

"Reservoirs of energy," murmured Angus, rubbing hand on thigh. "If you could harness that energy and turn it into channels of production . . ."

His blue eyes widened as breath caught in his throat. Stasor smiled, his old head nodding. "That's what we Elders used. We powered our machines with it. We needed no fuel, no refilling of bins or tanks. It was always there, ready to tap."

"Does the Book of Nard mention it?"

The old man nodded. "All our secrets are contained in the Book of Nard. Do you want to see it?"

They went up a flight of spiralling steps and into a room where heavy golden drapes hung bright and splendid. On a wooden rest lay a closed book, its covers solid gold, its parchment leaves tinted a pale rose.

"Open it," said the Guardian.

Angus bent and lifted the cover. He gazed on the archaic lettering etched into the thick vellum.

Each man has in him the seeds of his own immortality. He must progress or he must die. And the race is like the man. Who shall

say what path that progression shall take? A man cannot know his own future. Neither does the race. This is the Book of Nard, first of the Elder Race. With encouragement to all peoples who come after us, we leave this short transcript of our past.

Angus lifted his eyes. He stared at the smiling Guardian, who nodded. Quickly the pirate touched the parchment, spread the pages wide. His keen blue eyes scanned the etchings while he read the record of those who had gone on. He scanned mathematical and astronomical formulae, chemical equations, biological charts.

He whispered, "The entire history of the race, told in the achievements of its scientists!"

"It is all that lives."

"I don't understand it, of course. I catch a thought, here and there. But the entire equation . . ."

"You don't understand it?"

"No."

The old man smiled. He said suddenly, "Would you like to see some of those achievements in action? Would you like to see the worlds in three-dimensional space, the island universes, the galaxies, the stars and their planets?"

Angus said, "I've been out among the Six Worlds. I've seen other systems through telescopes."

The old man laughed. It was a spontaneous, happy sort of laugh. "I don't mean that way. Come, let me show you what my race can do." Angus caught him smiling oddly, the corners of his lips drawing down, as though he shared a queer joke only with himself.

They did not use the stairway this time. They stepped into a bare room walled and ceilinged and floored with shining steel. The old man touched a stud on the door.

The room of the book was gone.

IN ITS stead, there was a round chamber with a transparent dome that revealed stars twinkling uncounted miles above. In the middle of the otherwise unfurnished room stood a low, flat dais set with chairs riveted on their curving metal legs into the dais. A bank of controls was set flush in the floor of the platform.

The old man led him to the dais. He

smiled, bending over the control panel, "This is the kind of observatory your race will have, someday. You won't have to depend on polished mirrors and light and thick lenses. Basically the principle of the thing is the same as that of the teleport room we used to come over here. We just make use of coordinated space and time factors. It's like steering a boat on an uncharted ocean. If you know where your lodestar is you can go anywhere you want."

He turned and reached for a chair. We're ready now. You are perfectly safe, no matter what you see, or think you see. Just relax."

The reflected light in the room was fading. Blackness came down through the transparent dome and surrounded them. It was like the Staratarium Red Angus had visited on Mawk—or it was, until Angus saw stars beside and below him.

A nebulae that was uncounted light years away came rushing toward them. It was a spinning silver wheel at a distance, but it broke into great blotches of black space to dissolve into just another star system without form or noticeable nebulosity.

They swooped over a reddish planet and dropped through its atmosphere. They studied great buildings of stone and metal that towered high into the clouds. Tiny fliers and great air-freighters dotted the skies. The old man said, "This people used their science wisely. They built a civilization that gives every man all he wants which is, in effect, all he can understand."

They left the red planet, swept light years away and down through heavy mists to a greenish globe whirling majestically in the light of its distant sun. Beneath them lush, tropical jungles lifted fronds and branches to the steaming mists. Somewhere in that massed carpet of vegetation an animal screamed in its dying agonies. Through a break in the trees Angus saw a naked man squat and hairy and with a stone-bladed spear in his hand, fleeing before the bounding fury of a gigantic tiger. The great cat was making its last leap, spreading its talons into the man's shivering flesh, as the mists crept up and hid them.

"A young world," Stasor said softly, "with all its life ahead of it in which to find its destiny."

They went out into space and found a planet where giant insects ruled, where a lumbering thing in the shape of a man, but mindless, was used for heavy labor. Another planet showed lizards dwelling in strangely wrought mansions. A third showed mind-beings that looked like crimson jellyfish hanging in midair by some means of mental suspension.

"All these," explained Stasor with a wave of his palm, "are freaks. Life throughout the whole universe, across all of its uncountable light-years, follows mainly a pattern like our own. Creatures that we call man, with two arms, two legs, two eyes, a nose and mouth, breathing atmosphere into lungs, have been the ruling race because of circumstances like gravity and atmosphere, over which they themselves have no control.

"One more example, then we're done. . . ."

They fled across star galaxies, through sprawling universe where binaries and dwarf stars and red giants alternated against the black void like a spangled curtain. They went through the Megellanic Cluster and the Andromeda nebula. They came swooping down so swiftly that the stars blurred a little, even at their incredible distances, toward another galaxy.

Stasor found a little star. It was surrounded by nine planets. He chose the third planet outward from the star, and dropped his observational platform through the heaviside and ionosphere.

Angus craned forward. He liked this world. It reminded him vaguely of Karr, with its green grasses and rolling oceans.

"Its inhabitants call it the Earth. A peaceful place. Look over there—you can see the city clearer now."

It had graceful spires and round, lovely dwellings. Giant ships rested beside white, sparkling wharves. People went back and forth clad in light, airy garments. There was an air of glowing contentment.

Stasor said, "This is their golden age. It will last a long time. Soon they will colonize other planets near them. In the end—some million years from now—these people will rule almost all the known universes. And yet, compared to ours, their science is just a crawling child."

ANGUS felt a touch of jealousy. "Why should they rule the worlds? We people of Karr . . ."

"Wait, not yet. I want to show you this world three hundred years ago."

He touched a lever. The world below them grew away, shot backward and out into space. Angus cried out in amazement. "It's receding away from us."

"I'm going back in time. Remember, this is an expanding universe. It's come a long ways in the past three centuries, going toward the fixed star, Vega. We have to follow it."

This time, there was no lovely world. There was only blackened earth, charred and scorched. Great humps of steel stuck up from the ground like the fire-blackened ribs of some giant fallen in swamp-muck. From the west came seven thin, lean shapes, speeding through the air. From the blackened ground came thinner, smaller shapes to intercept them. The small shapes were like wasps in their darting and their speed. The big shapes never had a chance. They went down in masses of red flame, spinning.

Stasor announced, "This is their Last War. It is to go on ten more years. The seven shapes you saw were bombers loaded to their wings with atomic bombs. The smaller ships were fighters, their armaments mounted with fission-guns, an invention of an American scientist."

"Ten more years!" flinched Angus. "There's only blackened ground for them to live on."

"They live underground," explained Stasor.

Angus mused, "There's such a sharp difference between this world and what it's to be like three hundred years from this time."

"The American who invented the fission gun," explained Stasor, "will lead their world to that pinnacle. He is going to organize the remnants of the civilization left after the last war, compel interracial wedlock and births. The biological result of that will be, naturally, a new and different race in the course of the years. It is that race that will go out from Earth to the stars."

Angus regarded Stasor thoughtfully.

"You're thinking that what the American did with his people, I can do with mine."

The old man shrugged. He reached out and twisted the dials. He murmured, "Karr fights a war just as deadly as the one you see below. There's a difference. Instead of death, Karr's enemies deal it stagnation and degeneration."

"If I could get the Diktor to give the Hierarch's sciences to the people," Angus mused.

"Where there is hope you have new life," smiled Stasor gently. "Without science to benefit their lives the people of Karr have no hope."

Angus lashed out bitterly, "The Diktor is too powerful. There isn't any way to beat him."

"I will show you a way," murmured the old man.

IV

STAL TAY held high court before his ruby throne. He sat with right hand on his knee, bent forward, thin lips smiling. Before him stood the Hierarch, rigid with rage, black eyes burning under the shadow of his white cowl. To the Hierarch's left an almost naked Moana was crumpled on the cold stone floor, manacles rivetted to her wrists and ankles, her white flesh gleaming through torn garments.

Stal Tay taunted, "You come too late, Hierarch. I know where Red Angus went, what he went for, and who sent him."

"It was done in your interests," rasped the scientist. "I brought her to you that you might know the truth."

Stal Tay glanced at the weeping Moana. "So many odd things are done in my supposed interests these days. At that, I'm almost inclined to believe you but what really bothers me is this—did Angus find . . ."

The Diktor snapped off his speech abruptly. He rose half out of his throne, fingers clutching the jeweled arms. The Hierarch whirled. Even Moana turned her head to look, the sobs still racking her body.

A yellow glow was forming in midair a foot above the stone tiles of the Audience Chamber. The yellow glittered, coruscated and faded away. Where the color was now

stood a flat black dais with three chairs whose curving legs were rivetted to the floor of the dais. A man turned from the control panel that rose between the seats, a man with red hair and a tanned body. The man looked at them and laughed.

"Angus," whimpered Moana.

"Seize him," raged Stal Tay.

Angus bent and lifted something and held it up. It glittered in the light filtering through the arched windows of the Audience Chamber. Angus said, "This is the Book of Nard. I've come to bargain with you, Stal Tay."

The Diktor sank back into his throne, gesturing his guards aside. He said, "What do you want for the Book?"

"Moana."

"Moana," said the Diktor in surprise. "Is that all? Take her . . . but wait. How do I know this isn't a trick? How do I know I'll get the Book?"

Angus stepped from the dais to the floor of the chamber. He placed the book in its golden covers on the floor. "I went to the City of the Ancients. I met Stasor and took the Book of Nard from him. I came to bring it to you. I see I came just in time to save Moana."

Stal Tay came to his feet. "That thing you ride. What is it? Tell me its secret and I'll pardon you."

Angus laughed in his face. "Stasor calls it a teleportator. It shifts space, draws sectors of space together in an instant. In it a man can move from here to anywhere on Karr. Stasor knows many things, Stal Tay. One of them is how to bring you off that throne!"

The Diktor's face purpled. He started to talk but his eyes caught the golden covers of the Book of Nard and he controlled his anger. "Take her," he said, "before I decide the Book isn't worth your insults!"

Irons clanking, the girl stepped to Angus' side, let him lift her to the dais. Then Angus turned and studied the Diktor through narrowed eyelids.

"I'm giving you the Book now, Stal Tay. But it's only fair to warn you—I'll be back for it!"

He stepped onto the dais, turned a knob on the control panel. The dais fled and

the golden bubble came back, and then that, too, disappeared.

Moana sobbed as the dais fled through shifting white mists. Angus knelt beside her, using his disintegrator on the links of her manacles. She said, "The Diktor will send men for you. He'll never let you get away with this. You've only won a temporary victory."

Angus chuckled, "He'll be too busy with the Hierarch and the Book of Nard to go after me for a while. When he does, it will be too late." He dropped the severed chains to the floor of the dais. "You see, none of the scientists in the Citadel will understand the sciences in the book. They'll tell Stal Tay that and he won't believe them. There'll be a minor war between the Diktor and the Hierarchy. Once a breach between them is made, we'll step into it."

THE dais settled on something solid. The golden veil dissipated as before a wind, to reveal the smoke-blackened beams of a tavern room. Tandor was there, a wooden mug in one hand, straining forward from the tableside, his other hand clutching its edge, staring at them.

Angus helped Moana down. Tandor drained the mug and slammed it on the tabletop. He demanded, "Well? Got a bellyful of it? Ready for the star trails?"

"Not yet, Tandor."

Tandor growled and rubbed his palm on his bald head. He grumbled, "You'll be a martyr yet. You watch. You'll see. Red Angus—who died saving nothing!"

The pirate grinned at him, leaning his palms flat on the tabletop. "If I win, you know what'll happen, don't you? You and I will have to rule Karr. You'll be my major-domo. You'll wear fine clothes and make decisions and listen to people bellyache."

Tandor howled, leaping up so suddenly that his chair went skidding. He slammed his palms on the table. "Not me!" he bel-lowed. "I want no office and no snivelling folk to spoil my days! I—"

Angus moved a hand. He put it flat to Tandor's chest and held it there. The bald giant snapped his lips together. He grew silent as a clam, and as still.

The door was opening.

Something that looked like a man, that

was swathed in white bandages from toes to head, with just two slits for eyes and a hole for a mouth, was coming in the room. Tantor's hand swooped and lifted with a disintegrator.

"Angus," whispered the apparition. "Red Angus! I need help."

The pirate was across the room, catching the bandaged figure in cradling arms, lowering him to the couch. He whispered, "This is the second time you've been on that couch, Thordad. What happened to you?"

"When I left you at the globe-ship dock one of Stal Tay's spies knifed me and left me for dead. The Hierarch sent men to find me. They doctored me and were carrying me to the Citadel when the Diktor jumped us. He sent me to his torture dungeons."

The man shuddered under the bandages. The eyes, through the slits, were wide with horror and remembered pain. "The Diktor wanted to learn what the Hierarch was after. I wouldn't tell him. Before that he confronted me with the Hierarch who disowned me. He told Stal Tay to do with me what he wanted!"

The raw hate throbbed in Thordad's voice. It sent a cold ripple down Angus' spine. The pirate leaned closer to the bandaged mouth. "The Diktor let his beasts at me for three days. It was horrible. But I got away. I think I went mad with the pain. I crept to my cousin's house and was bandaged and partially healed there. Then I came here. You're the only hope any of us have. You've got to do something—anything—to stop that madman and the Hierarch!"

Angus wiped his hands on his jacket. "You, Tantor. What news have you?"

"I've been busy too," Tantor growled, eying Thordad curiously. "I've roused the men and women of the Lower City. I've sent for the pirates on Yassanin, sent for warriors from the cities of Streeth and Fayalat. We've a crew of fighting men with swords and spears and a few disintegrators. But with the scientific might of Stal Tay and the Hierarch we're beaten before we start."

Angus laughed. "Not yet. Stasor has promised help. We're to meet him and get the weapons he told me about. Into the

teleportator on the double—all of you."

When they were in the chairs fastened to the dais, Angus threw over the lever. A golden mist formed about them, hardened. There was an instant of coldness . . .

The golden mist disappeared. The teleportator stood before the fountain in the Tower of the Ancients. Angus sprang from the machine. "Stasor, I'm back!"

There was no answer. Only the silence of the dead walls of the dead city replied.

It was Moana who found the blood-stained bit of silk that had been ripped from Stasor's garment. Wordlessly she held it out to Angus.

His belly turned over when he saw it. He looked at the girl, then at Tantor.

"The Diktor's come for him. With Stasor to unravel the secrets in the Book of Nard, Stal Tay can't be beaten!"

Tantor shrugged massive shoulders. "I knew that a long time ago. We'll all die. It's just a matter of when and where."

IN THE time Angus had allotted him, Tantor had thrown up a small city of tents and wickiups along the stone ridges of the Bloody Cliffs. Here came the pirates from Yassinan, the starved soldiery from the star cities of Fayalat and Kor. Here were half-naked gypsy girls and camp followers, fighting men and muckers. Here were dishonored captains and untried youths who owned swords and a hot hunger to use them.

In the red fire of an armorer's forge, Red Angus handled a ring-barreled gun that was powered by a portable dynamo set up on a small, two-wheeled cart.

The armorer said, "It's weak and it's clumsy, but it's the best I could do. The electroray gets its power from the dynamo in the cart. Power travels along the fuel line to the breach. A tiny converter translates it into a thin beam of force. I've seen them in the museums. I made sketches. Given more time I could do better."

Red Angus put a grin on his lips and held it there by sheer will-power. His hand clapped the man on the back. He told him, "You've done fine, Yoth! Keep it up. Turn out as many as you can!"

The armorer shook his head glumly. "They won't be much alongside the disin-

tors that Stal Tay will nave. Even their sonic-beams will do more damage than this!"

Tandor came swaggering up through the half-naked, hairy chested men who fought with blunted sabres and war-spears. There was dirt on his face, and runnels of sweat ran on his barrel chest. He planted his legs apart, and glowered at Red Angus.

"You're mad as a priest of Grom. You keep us here when we'd do better by scattering to the six worlds."

Angus said, "These are the toughest fighting men in the galaxy. If they can't take the Citadel no one can. Once we get within sword-sweep of the Diktor's guards . . ."

Tandor bellowed. He went up on his toes and waved his arms, and his veins stood out on his bald head. "As well get within sword-sweep of Ashtal the Shameless!" he roared. "The Diktor will sweep the streets with disintegrator beams when he sees us coming. Maybe you want to play martyr, but I've better uses for my life. Take that gypsy girl . . ."

Angus caught him by the fur of his cloak and shook him. "Forget your gypsy wenches. We go into the Lower City at night. All of us, over a week's time. We bed down in different homes. Loyal homes. A fortnight from now will be the Night of the Serpent. Singing and dancing in the streets. Wine. Women."

Tandor grinned. "Aie, that sounds good."

"At the hour of the Dog we hit the Citadel. There'll be so much roistering going on we'll belt-whip every mother's son into the streets that night, and make 'em yell to cover our movements. No one'll notice us!"

"We hit the Citadel from every street. Some of us will get through. Ten streets, ten companies, each of them a flying wedge to get inside and kill Stal Tay. That's our first job. After that . . ."

Red Angus talked on, sketching in the hot sands. He did not see a bandaged Thordad come out of a tent and stand there, watching them, and listening. Thordad turned away after a while and went back into the tent where he sat shivering and staring down at his hands.

Neither did Red Angus see him that

night when he daggered a guard and fled on a haml across the desert for Karr City. They found the guard but guessed him a victim of a jealous lover for he had a reputation as a lady's man.

The days slid into weeks, and the fires burned and metal glowed, and the forges and the anvils never stopped. Swords and shields and spears, daggers and clumsy electrarays were turned out for eager hands.

They broke camp in the faint mists of an early dawn. On ewe-necked haml and on foot, by cart and by stolen jetcar, they left the base of the Bloody Cliffs. They came into Karr City by twos and threes and hid themselves in the taverns and in the thatch-roofed houses. The city knew them and the city swallowed them, and the city slumbered, waiting.

In the tavern of the Spotted Stag, Red Angus paced the floor. Tandor, an arm around his gypsy girl, was sampling a new tun of imported wine. Moana was white-faced, pale and silent at the table.

Angus said, "I don't like it. I don't like it. I have the feel of a wolf sniffing at the jaws of a trap."

Tandor drew his lips from the gypsy's neck long enough to say, "It's quiet, isn't it. What more do you want?"

"That's just it. It's too quiet. There are no Citadel guards out hunting me. No arrests for five days. No street patrols, even!"

"Good. Then let's call it off and go back to Yassanin. You'll like Yassanin, honey." Tandor nuzzled the girl's throat, "I have a big house there. Much wine. Better wine than this!"

Angus stared at the man through slitted eyes, reached for a goblet and lifted it. His hand poised the goblet, about to throw. Angus swore and buried his nose in the cup. He flung it from him, and it broke against the wall.

THE city stayed quiet for five days. On the morning of the Night of the Serpent it exploded with energy. Men and women, in masks and costumes, paraded and sang. They drank and danced and the Citadel brooded down on them.

The day wore on. Tandor and Angus were busy, keeping some semblance of order in their fighting crews, keeping the

men from the wine-barrels, readying them for their assignments. Tandor went stalking into the taverns and the wine shops with heavy hands, striking out as he walked, often upending an unfortunate into a wine-tun after knocking in its head with the head of the man he held upside down in his hands.

Red Angus went more circumspectly, fighting off the tipsy women and armed footpads who waxed rich in the torchlight gatherings during the long Night of the Serpent. He rounded up his crews and found them their weapons.

"Tonight the stars revolt!"

At the hour of the Dog ten companies of hard-eyed fighting men came out of the shadows of the ten cobblestoned streets that led by twisting tiers to the Citadel. They went up the curving stone stairs to the smooth Citadel streets and started forward . . .

And then the Diktor struck.

The sonicbeams came first, cutting the front ranks to bloody pulp. Disintors rayed into action. Men went down silently under the lightning-swift impact of purplish lances.

It was a rout.

Here, a naked mercenary from Fayalat would flesh his blade in a few necks as he drove in behind a wall of dead flesh. There, a warrior from Kor might take three of Stal Tay's soldiers with him before he touched hands with his ancestors. But the beams and the rays slew in the darkness and the rabble was driven back.

Where Red Angus fought with an electroray cart, sweeping the ringed nozzle of his weapon in and out of the shadows, the men of the Lower City stood a while. They fought with the ferocity of trapped thots, for the pits of Stal Tay yawned for them.

"Hold firm!" roared Tandor, his sword a sweeping line of gray death where it circled and darted.

"Fall back," cried Angus. "Back to reform! They've trapped us well, the tricky dogs."

A man with a bandaged face stood out a moment from the shadows, pointing. He cried, "Half a hundred *oblis* to the man who brings down Red Angus!"

"Thordad!" shouted Angus, and he knew

now the manner of his betrayal. Thordad had seen a chance for reinstatement and had taken it. He had seen the rabble that served Red Angus and knew the disciplined power of the Diktor's guards. He had gone with news of Angus' plans. This trap was the result.

Red Angus forgot the others. He sighted the electroray carefully. A thin beam of brilliance lanced out. It touched Thordad on face and neck. A headless corpse rolled at the guards' feet as they came forward.

Their rush caught Angus and the men with him. It swept them backward through the streets, rolled up their flanks. It clubbed the center with sonicbeams until men screamed in the agony of mashed legs and caved-in chests.

Angus fought like a maddened griff. He used the electroray like a broom, sweeping it before him. He kicked the two-wheeled cart ahead for without the dynamo in the cart the electroray was useless.

A sudden rush of guards caught Angus in a maelstrom of cursing, howling men.

They hit him and drove him back against the glittering metal collar of one of the black pools, yawning grim and silent in the cobblestoned square. They hammered him with swordblades and pounded the cart with metal-headed axes.

Angus stumbled, fell. He came up slowly, his back to the cold metal collar of the pool, the ringed barrel of the useless electroray still in his hands.

It's all over, he told himself, staring at the swords coming for him. I've failed, and I'll die, and so will Moana, and Tandor, and all the rest of this motley crew who tried to pull themselves up by their bootstraps.

Angus clubbed with the ringed barrel and a man fell whimpering at his feet.

"Come on!" the pirate roared. "Here's my last stand, here at the edge of the pool! You're done with Red Angus. See how a free man dies."

Angus broke off, eyes wide.

The pool!

One of the black pools of Karr . . .

WHAT was it Stasor had said of those pools? "The pools are nothing more than atomic radiation—sheer energy—bot-

tled up in vast chambers lined with stala-hasil. Ready for use at any time.'

Ready for use.

With the savage fury of the barbarian, Angus slammed the ringed barrel at the faces pressing in on him. They wanted him alive and that gave him the precious moment he needed.

He whipped the electrora high in the air, swung it so the weighted powercord flailed high and far over the metal rim of the pool's collar. It dropped down and down into the black depths.

Angus pressed the stud.

A ravening stream of black mist shot from the ringed nozzle. It touched the oncoming soldiers of the Diktor, touched them, and . . .

Ate them!

When the black mist faded the Diktor's soldiers faded, too. They were gone in that desolation of yawning street and crumpled walls. Where the black mist had touched nothing remained.

Tandor bellowed.

The star-pirates roared their glee.

Angus moved the weapon and touched the stud again. The black mist fled outward, up one street, down another. When he was finished there were no soldiers facing them. The streets to the Citadel lay empty, beckoning.

They went forward in a ravening wave of fury, the fury of roused fighting men, who had looked the eyeless sockets of Death's skull in the face and lived. The night held no more terrors for them for their nostrils were tasting the fragrance of victory. Other men came up from the Lower City to join them, men who bore home-made weapons, crude clubs and axes.

Angus caught a sweat-streaked Tandor by the arm. "This gun! The powercord that fell in the black pool. That's what did it. It's a weapon of the Elders. The pool feeds it, gives it power . . ."

"What matters that?" bellowed Tandor, shaking a new sword in his hand. "It worked!"

"But it won't work if I can't keep the powercord inside the pool."

Tandor blinked, grunting as understanding came to him. "Huh. That's different. Dark. Gatl. Sonal. At the double, you riff-

raff. To me."

He gave orders crisply, then swung to Angus. "They'll scour the Lower City for copper wire. We'll couple an extension to the cord so you can take it wherever you want."

Angus nodded. "Put a file of men on either side of it. Keep them there. Make them fight for that cord with their lives. If they fail us, we die."

Tandor handpicked his men, big men all, with the scars of many battles speaking their experience. The cord was slit and fitted with gleaming copper cable-lengths, insulated, and welded tightly.

Weapon in hands, Red Angus led his rabble army up the stone-block roadway steps, upward from the mire and filth of the Lower City, upward to the clean white reaches of the Citadel.

The Diktor's personal guards made a sortie against them, but the black mist swept them away. When the Hierarch sent his troops to join those of the Diktor the mist swirled around them once, and then blew away, leaving the Citadel gardens empty of opposition.

It was over.

They walked through the gardens, into the halls and corridors of the Palace. Men stood weaponless, fright tightening the lines of their faces.

Tandor roared, "The Diktor, you foul hounds. Where is he?"

Men pointed and at the end of their fingers loomed the great golden bulk of the Audience Chamber.

The Diktor and the Hierarch stood before the ruby throne. They were beaten men, expecting death, their cheeks washed an ashen grey.

Angus said, "If you've harmed Stasor you'll take a year to die."

The Diktor gestured wearily. "He's in chains, in the lower pits. We haven't harmed him. He would not translate the Book of Nard. But even so, dead he was useless to us. Alive, he might have changed his mind."

He went on to explain how he had traced Angus' journey in the spectragraph, how his men had followed Angus' course in globe ships to bring the god of Karr to the Citadel. He said, "You were beaten.

Whipped. My messengers told me that you were hemmed in, your men chopped to thumbits. And yet—yet you come here—"

Madness glinted in the Diktor's eyes. His right hand moved like lightning, and the blue metal of a disinter caught fire from the soft luminescence of the walls.

The Diktor was swift but Tandor was faster. His hand blurred and a glittering longsword jumped the five feet that separated them. It drove the dead body of the Diktor back three steps to the ruby throne. He fell at its base and a pool of blood grew larger on the floor.

The Hierarch shrugged and put a pellet to his mouth. The poison acted with incredible speed. He was falling as the chamber door opened and a gently smiling Stasor entered, leaning on his staff.

Angus and Moana stood on the heights of the Citadel and looked down at the Lower City. They saw the thatched roofs no longer, but instead tidy houses, clean streets and healthy children. Men and women walked with pride, their bodies clean, enjoying the new life that Stasor and the Book of Nard could bring them. It would take time, all that. But it would come.

Moana moved gently. Her hand caught his. He turned her head up and his lips settled on hers.

A hundred feet away, Tandor grinned. "A martyr, I called him," he told the night.

He thought of a black-haired noblewoman who had been widowed in the night's fighting. Tandor rubbed his head again and chuckled. He tiptoed from the gardens.

Vizigraph continued from page 3

This little gem was coined by no lesser genius (?) than Milton Berle, and while Uncle Milt perhaps intended it for a joke, it is a statement of one of the basic principles of humanoid survival:

"Minds are like parachutes—they function only when open."

With this I exit—but not for long,

BRUCE HAPKE

Ed's note—Since you used the word trivial for so much that was worthwhile we are honored to be labeled trifling.

UNENTHUSIASTIC

212 West Avenue,
Cartersville, Ga.

Dear Mr. r. Project Robot P.S.I.:

Perhaps I should have started this letter by saying, Dear Filius Feminae Canis, which is Latin for Dear S! @-*/1/2/4/?'#\$%.

It was with the relief of a relieved Venusian that I finally put the copy of PLANET STORIES on the shelf to gather dust. Frankly, I doubt if dust has the guts to approach such a revolting alien. Ach! Down with editors! Get robots for authors and maybe we will have a mag that is accepted by even the most sensitive Fathers.

I am perhaps the loneliest s-t-f fan in north Georgia! Will someone please write to me? I long for the day when I can shake the dust off the mailbox and retrieve a precious letter!

In buying s-t-f mags, I am attracted by the cover. Unfortunately, this month, I gave this issue of PLANET STORIES second place. On the inside, Vestal was okay, but whose pen slipped in trying to illustrate THE INHABITED MEN?

I, ineffectually, am trying to start an inter-state s-t-f fans club. The idea is simple. So simple, in fact, that you probably know what it is. For further information, write me at the address above.

What are those globules of words you misrepre-

sent as stories. They are nothing but juvenile drivel. I want stories that have the eerie tang of the future. Perhaps you don't understand. Read Arthur J. Burks' TRIN! That's what I want in place of trash you contaminate your precious mags with. Now and then, especially then, you have a sparkling bit of wit and sarcasm mixed in with the stories. At least it's something to relieve the drear monotony encountered so much!

Here, for the delectation of the discerning public, is my unfrank and biased opinion of your trivial stories:

(1) LAST NIGHT OUT

Ooooooh! What would Canopus 43C say if he read my mind? I hope he keeps his mind on his own business!

(2) SANCTUARY, OH ULLA

Not too bad, but not enough action

(3) THE INCUBI OF PARALLEL X

It will be a charreuse sunset on Earth's third moon before 75-foot women inhabit Earth's hidden dimensions!

(4) LORD OF A THOUSAND SUNS

Enough action! Can't keep track of who is who!

(5) THE STAR FOOL

Very funny! It could have been longer and I wouldn't have complained!

(6) THE WATCHERS

Okay, but, oh well, nothing's perfect! The story was slow and needed a deep, dark plot! Well, as I said, nothing's perfect!

(7) TYDOR'S GIFT

Tydore was a smart cookie, but not an original one!

(8) VENGEANCE ON MARS

Good plot, but slowed down too much at the last!

(9) THE INHABITED MEN

Ultra-urp! Infra-urp! Too, too, too, too, slow; Gongo, the childish idiot just made

a bad impression on me. The whole thing was stupid!

(10) HOSPITALITY

After reading this, I sought just what those men sought, sleep! Like many of the others, it was a trifle dull. A trifle, I say! I underestimate my own vocabulary!

For Uncle Miltie's sake, speed up your stories!!!!

Inter-galactically yours,
VIC WALDROP

Ed's private note—Some comments very much to the point but I assure you this Robot never turns down a good one even if off-trail for us.

ARE WE THE BEETHOVEN?

19 Bowden St.,
Ryde,
New South Wales, Australia

Dear Sir:

PLANET STORIES has never been readily obtainable in this country. The first issue of Winter 1939 practically coincided with the outbreak of war and with the lowering of the dollar curtain. Since then only very sea-worn individual issues have found their way here. It was a great triumph then to be able at last to subscribe to a few U. S. prozines through an English agency with branches within the dollar area.

I was favorably impressed by the September issue. Your zine has a definite contribution to make to sf as a whole. The stories certainly fall into the "space opera" grouping but there is a place in the field for *all* types of stories, from space pirates to interwoven time streams, from escapist pulpism to thought-provoking classics. There is only one constant factor that must be maintained, that is *readability*.

The controversy that is always cropping up in letter columns between supporters of so-called "light escapism" seems quite futile. There is no denying that each fan has his "favorite" prozine but this does not justify condemning all the others. Each zine has its own individual personality which, while impossible to define, is a reflection of the editorial policy. There are no two magazines in the field that can be said to have identical personalities—none are redundant, each occupies a definite place. No other fiction—from detective to western—can present such a well coordinated grading of magazines. The genuine fan is thus obligated to read *all* types of stories. Just as one cannot compare Be-Bop to Beethoven one cannot compare PLANET to ASF; comparisons must be intra—not inter-specific.

PLANET is certainly readable. Well-written, fast-moving yarns that make no pretense to be what they aren't. Readability and sincerity make for a good magazine.

In conclusion, may I appeal to fans for help in catching up on ten years back reading? I would be most grateful to anyone with spare back issues of U. S. prozines who would contact me to make some trade arrangements. Perhaps fans may be interested in trading for sterling area publications or for mint current Australian stamps. Any mail received will be answered as promptly as international postal mechanisms permit.

Yours faithfully,
GEORGE R. MEYER

Ed's note—No, I guess he means we're be-bop, not Beethoven, but then robots can't be sensitive.

HOLD EVERYTHING!

932 Lanterman Ave.,
Youngstown 1, Ohio

Dear Rattle-trap:

Arrives now the first letter from this illustrious Personage of great charm and ineffable radiance to (ugh) you. The object of these carefully-considered words is the September (ugh) PLANET STORIES.

THE INCUBI OF PARALLEL X was very good, but the cover was, of course, (ugh). Positively. More of this type, please. I likee. . . .

LORD OF A THOUSAND SUNS must take second place. Anderson—not the (ugh) that does the covers—is one of my favorite authors. Love his "Double-Dyed Villains" and "Helping Hand" which appeared in Another Magazine.

Among "The Short Stories from all the Galaxies" (ugh—who wrote *that*?) TYDORE'S GIFT was the best written—from Coppel yet!—with SANCTUARY, OH ULLA! running it a close second. I likee pic too.

I just noticed something. Re the second paragraph. The last two sentences refer to the story, not the (ugh) cover.

The rest of the stories line up in the following order:

5. VENGEANCE ON MARS
6. HOSPITALITY
7. THE WATCHERS
8. LAST NIGHT OUT
9. THE INHABITED MEN
10. THE STAR FOOL—Appropriate. Last place. And the letters. Ah. The letters. (Ugh).

Give first place to Don Lanoue. If you counted his letter (?) as a story, I'd give it third place. 2.) Mavis Hartman. 3.) Lin (He's a him? Ugh) Carter. Never in my life did I see such a mangy collection as most of the rest. Ugh.

I don't know why anybody would want a Planet-pic anyway. Just look at them. The one on pages 4-5: I wouldn't be seen dead with it. But if I *did* have the original there isn't much I could do about it; I'd die as soon as I saw it. The one on page 35: that one I like. (I can't back out of it—I already said I likee it.) And page 50, 57, 67, 71, 75 (*that* one was really bad), 80 and 84. One loud (ugh)!

Oh well—as long as the stories remain fair. You spend \$2.50-\$3 for a book and don't get any pics at all (is that bad?).

Insanely (and don't think I can't prove it)
REGIS J. MURPHY

ZOOKS, HE REALLY LIKES IT

Silver Lake Drive
Portage, Wis.

Dear Editor:

I just finished reading the January issue of PLANET STORIES, and I couldn't restrain myself from writing a few lines to you to express my opinion about it.

The January issue is one that you may well be proud of, because it has that indescribable something about it which captivates everyone who reads it, and it makes PLANET stand out as a true, mighty pillar of science fiction.

Many of my friends at the University of Wisconsin ask me why I persist in reading such "trash," and they wonder why I don't read something worthwhile. I am glad indeed that I always have a ready

answer for them. I tell them that I am proud to read science fiction, which in my opinion is exemplified in its highest form by PLANET STORIES, because it is a literature of a unique type which, besides having expanded by leaps and bounds in the last decade, has provided for me and millions of other readers a service of unestimable value. It has provided an unparalleled form of mental relaxation which for me has yet to be equaled or approached by any other literature.

With his story SARGASSO OF LOST STARSHIPS in this issue, Poul Anderson has advanced another step upward in my opinion. He has fresh ideas, and if he keeps it up, I think he may soon surpass Brackett and Bradbury. This, I realize, would be quite an accomplishment, but Anderson has great potentialities. All one has to do is look at his stories, and it is soon seen that my beliefs are soon well founded. His story was the outstanding one of the issue.

Next in line comes H. B. Fyfe's CALLING WORLD-4 OF KITHGOL. This story was, to say the least, very good. I do believe, however, that if the writer would have carried it just a little bit farther, it would have vied for first place honors.

The short stories were typical of the usually well written and well selected stories of PLANET. I rate them as follows:

1. THE DANCERS—captivating to say the least.
2. LAST CALL—interesting but lacked something.
3. THE ANDROID KILL—well rounded short story.
4. IT—usual short—blood and guts.
5. THE VANDERLARK—lacking interest—needs new blood.
6. A FINE DAY FOR DYING—dead and lacking in action.

The VIZIGRAPH improves with each issue, keep it up.

In closing I have but one thing to say, "Keep up the good work and keep PLANET on top of the pile."

Sincerely yours,
a usually silent but old P.S. fan
ROBERT E. KOHLS

OBJECTION TO BAGPIPES UNFAIR TO SCOTLAND!

Ste. 11-406 Notre Dame Ave.,
Wpg., Man., Canada.

Dear Old Thing:

Yes, it is I, the Unbearable. (At least all my friends think that I am). I am here to give you a hunk or two of friendly advice to improve your mag, Lowly One.

First off I desire to see you eradicate those Things that you so fondly call Covers and replace them with something that resembles one. One gets tired of seeing nothing but those Sexy things glaring at you out of the dark corners where they're kept. Oh well. Ever since your first ish, you've had those covers so I guess that nothing can help them. But don't you want to attract more customers, etc.? You, Lowly Thing, are slowly slipping down to where all bad mags. go—to Hell and gone.

Also you, Lowly One, are ruining my nights' sleep. How can I go to sleep when you keep me up reading your mag.??? Tsk, Tsk.

How's about having a lead novel that really is stf, and not something that the cat dragged in??? Poul Anderson is good for adventure and that's that. Nearly every ish. is taken up with his novel. So the

fellow has to eat but let's try to get an STF, huh??? Gah. Also Guh. I believe that his latest novel is something to groan over?? Bagpipes yet! Horrid. Horrid. I can just visualize the scene now:
For simplicity let's call the hero Ha and ye heroine He.

He—Your strength. Your wild roving eyes. That glassy stare. Those leering lips. That fiendish look. I can't resist you.

Ha—Oh hum. All women are affected like that.

He—Play, Gypsy, play. I desire to hear that wild refrain again. Play.

With that he produces his bagpipes (which resembles something like a modern-day cream-separator) and . . . (shudder) plays.

He—Such heavenly music. Sigh. Take me in your arms mighty one.

Ha—Very well my dear.

Lowd grunts . . . also groans.

Ha—Please dear. You're hurting me. Don't hold me so tight. Let go. Egads. Now I see it all. You are not He. You are a mad robot named Mylloz come to kill me. But you shall never take me. I shall fight to your finish.

With that he produces a toothpick and proceeds to send the fiend to his death-bed. Nonchalantly the robot takes out a blaster and blows Ha to death. He wails. End of scene. World in ruins . . . Ha dead. He crying. They live happily ever after.

GADS

Who wants stories like that??? Hmmmm???

There is one redeeming thing about PLANET tho. You mostly always carry some good shorts. So I shall now leave you with blaster in one hand and pink-striped shorts held up in the other. Goom-bye.

Yours STF, anatically,
SENIOR ANONYMOUS

Ed's note—How would you recognize Planet without delicately underdressed girls? Why you'd never be able to locate it on the newsstands.

CONSIDER THE ARTICLE ANGLE

Pusan, Korea

Dear Ed:

I have been reading science fiction for several years now and it's seldom that I feel that I have to write a letter in praise of something. In your November issue however I came across what I consider a masterpiece of illustration that cannot go unsung. I advise the Vestal to retire from business as such a gem is done only once in a lifetime. The story itself was an excellent piece of science fiction, and the illustration added the perfect touch to make it perfect. Sir, I salute you.

Now that I have committed myself this far I may as well give you the works on the rest of your mag. THE SWORDSMAN OF LOST TERRA, what I managed to force myself to read, was lousy. (That is an understatement too). Your HALFTIPPER was an excellent bit of science fiction, I would rate it a good second. I didn't like the way PALIMPSEST started so I never finished it. THE GRIM GREEN WORLD, was pretty good, THE ILLUSIONARIES was run of the mill stuff, must have been a filler. I thought WRECK OFF TRITON was rather obvious, but it was followed by a good story in THE CON-QUISTADORS COME.

Now comes the VIZIGRAPH. Above all other

features you have in your magazine I think the VIZIGRAPH is tops. HOWEVER, I don't always agree with a lot of the people who are writing in it. For instance the people who are rooting for the sexy covers. In the first place a woman in a form fitting bathing suit just isn't going to be in the super freezing compartment of space. In the second place if they have to have a woman with clothes off in the appropriate places the least they could do is have a different style of clothing for the different stories. Only once in a blue moon do you find a moonmaid in something truly different. Is that progress??? Then there's the guys who gripe about the paper all of the time. If you used any other paper you would cease to be a pulp magazine and half the glamor of finding a budding author who may someday be a genius is gone.

I think there is one feature that you lack that all good science-fiction mags should have however, and that is a section with a good long article on a scientific event of current interest. Well with that suggestion I see that my work has piled up in mountainous heaps and I gotta go. So until another masterpiece slaps me in the face, or someone in your VIZIGRAPH says something I don't like, I bid you SIONARRA from the exotic east.

Cpl. GRANT C. CALLAGHAN
HqSq-1 1st MARINE AIR WING
c/o FPO San Francisco,
California.

Ed's note—Maybe old Planet should run articles. Easy enough. What y'all in the middle of that poker game behind the barracks think?

FROM EVERY SIDE—COMPLIMENTS

Dear Editor:

Well, I bought a copy of the latest PLANET but just had to toss it aside as my stomach turned over at the stories. They were awful. Can't you get your authors to write anything but tripe, and very low grade tripe at that? I won't bother trying to comment on the stories for, as I said, I couldn't read them.

Special memo to Mike Wigodsky and Henry Burwell:

I am sorry to have to report that your efforts to insult me were rather puerile and childish. I don't mind being insulted but I like to have it done by an expert and neither one of you can rank in that classification. Can't you possibly do better next time?

In case you can't just send me a dollar and I will by return mail send you a folder that I have been to great effort to compile. The folder contains at least two dozen rich, ripe, rare, and juicy samples of the choicest Billingsgate this writer has seen for many a moon.

These terms have been carefully compiled from the letters of other readers so you can be sure of getting a well rounded selection. Some of them can even be used in mixed company so you can realize what a bargain it is.

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P. S. This booklet will show you how to insult everybody but a politician. Nothing can peel his hide off.

Ed's question—Have we the right to charge Sigler regular advertising rates?

COVERS AGAIN WIN ACCLAIM

Dear Jack:

Faith and begorra, we have an Irishman at the helm.

Oh, no . . . no . . . no! Not another Anderson cover! Egad! He was on the cover of the first PLANET STORIES I ever read . . . AND HE STILL IS! Don't tell me he's a major stockholder in the magazine.

Look, O'S., can't you get Bradbury anymore? I WANT BRADBURY!

I WANT BRAD—(Whoops! I said that.)!

I like Vestal's illos, but does he have to do so many? How about more and better artists? Vestal, I like. That other artist (I'm not sure, but in my copy, it looks like Houlihan) is good, too. But not *Napoli*! Argh! Why don't you get some really good artist—like Cartier?

I'm not going to rate the stories this time, so don't look for another page to this letter—it ain't here.

Oh! You printed my letter—but did you have to put it on the last page? And how did Mitchell get in again? And before me, too!

Oh, well. Now everybody can vote for me. (After reading what I wrote, I wouldn't do it myself). Pics to: (1) Tuning, (2) Lewkowicz, (3) Burwell.

Being as how PLANET has the nuttiest and fightingest letter column in STF, you can see why my letter isn't normal. Whenever I want to write an ignorant-looking epistle—I write to you.

Ultrascientifically,

HAROLD HOSTETLER
Box 163
Cairnbrook, Pa.

SOMEONE LIKES COVER I!

1120 Euclid Ave.,
Bristol, Va.

Dear Ed: (Surely the general manager is too busy to bother with editorship (too; just fending off the cries for more money must keep him (hopping, without undergoing the strain of curses from the fea)

Having just finished the current ish of P. S., I am feeling sort of lost, and since the next best thing to reading is writing letters, I'm off—like a herd of turtles, as we used to say. This ish struck me as being rather odd in that it contained no really outstanding stories, but all were slightly above the level I've come to expect from any one edition of any STF mag. Congrats! Such leveling off is usually the pred-

ecessor of new heights. The symbolism in the cover elicits from me a rousing cheer; although the center of attention is drawn from THE PIT, the bem hint at THE ILLUSIONARIES. 'Tis the first P. S. cover I've seen in ages that I looked at several times, and with growing interest.

The VIZIGRAPH contained some interesting epistles. I'd like to congratulate THE TYRO, Miss Mavis Hartman on her courageous questioning of Bems. Takes guts to ask it in print. The type of letter written by Doug Mitchell, as printed in this ish, is probably what blew up Dennis Strong's blood pressure several months ago. After considering the situation with the aid of a Tom Collins (ever wonder why so many VIZI correspondents allude to recent drinks?) I recall numerous other similar epistles, and find, way down in the depths of what is called my soul a sneaking sympathy for him. As for Carl Schemmerling's question, I can only say to him, "Rest easy, lad; everyone has different reasons for reading the stuff, but they all boil down to one: the desire to be entertained."

Michael Wigodsky has let himself in for plain, unadulterated hell. During the course of many years of arguing religion, I have found it is a very dangerous business to knock out from under people their old, cherished beliefs in what has been called "the history of the Hebrew race." It strikes at the foundations of their egos, and people are very quick to take audible, and often belligerent, exception. I forecast that you'll get letters from people who would agree basically with him re: Milton, giving him down the road for being a "heathen," and maybe even that supreme of epithets today, a "RED." While he was quoting, wonder why he didn't quote Karl Marx, who said, in effect, that "Religion is the narcotic of the people." One more thing on this matter. Milton's poetry does have aesthetic beauty, but one must dig deep and often to find it. Although I recognize this fact, I haven't been able to dig up the energy to go through it all, or even a small part of it, seeking the beauty. Too big a task.

Well, that's about all. I am tempted to go down the list, commenting on all of La VIZI, but it would take too much time to write, too much paper (and with taxes what they are, that's a big item), and too much of the ed's valuable time. One last request: Don't, by the eternal Bem of STF, print any more space-time-travel stories; *space* I can handle, but deliver me from *time*.

STFully yours,

J. W. LEAKE

ANY STF SONGS?

Editor, PLANET STORIES
New York, N. Y.

Wernersville, Penna.

Dear Sir:

I have been reading your magazine with great pleasure for more than a year now, but never wrote to you before. Just recently, however, I returned from a visit to my home town in Mississippi, which included a flying trip to New Orleans while the convention was in session. (Not really flying, you understand; hitch-hiking is what I did).

Although I was present for only one session of the Convention, I was much impressed by the gathering there, and particularly by the high quality of the entertainment. I was surprised, though, to notice that there did not seem to be any science fiction songs. At least there were none sung. Has anyone ever written any?

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If you can find space to publish this letter, perhaps some older fans will be kind enough to get in touch with me at the above address, and let me know if anyone ever has thought of writing any songs for science fiction fandom. Or just write to me. I understand many of the fans correspond with each other.

Next time I write, now that I've broken the ice, I will include more comment on your magazine, but really there's not too much I can say, at least not much that's critical, because I like practically everything in it so much.

Very truly yours,

CHESTER A. POLK
714 Carondelet,
New Orleans, La.

AH, PARDUMB ME!

Ye Olde Septembere
sixthe and, twentyeth,
in ye yeare, 1951

Dear old chap:

I'm wryting thisse letter from ye ancient Eynghland, where I am enyjoying a vacationne in my time machine. Yakke Yakke. I have oyne great idea. Why don't you turne ye PLANETIE STORYS into ye humorous magge of STF? Itte should be interesting.

Ah, I see that you published me letter in ye November ish. I love you maddly, old bean. Anything I can do for you? Light your cigar, shine your shoes, spit on a compeditor? I'm sendinge in oyne of my storys to you soon, andde you shouldde simply slaver to know that you arre ye first editor thatte I have sent this storie to. (who throw thatte?)

I've decided to rate the illos andde letters thisse tryp, rather than ye storys, because ye illos for ye storys kept me from readinge themme. BRRRRR!! (Yea Verily) Pardumb me sire, I have read HALF-TRIPPER, which I thotte wass oyne of ye best I have ever readde, and ye gory tale entitlede GRIM GREEN WORLD, whych contained oyne of ye oldest plots I have readde. Onn to ye letters. Tally ho! Henry W. Burwell, Jr., BRACK BRACK! Whatta slobbe. Mavis Hartman. A tyro? Oh comme now gentlemanne . . . Say, who's thisse TUNING chappe? Verily, he isse a genius. I likke him. Pvt. R. R. W. wasse a bitte shortie for a mislle to ye squirrel's nest of a magge likke ye PLANET STORYS. Doug Mitchell hasse found a clever way to abbreviate. "One of these days I'm going to get mad enuff, and send you one of my storys just to see you go nuts." I'm way ahead of ye Doug, why do you thinkke Bixl wasse carryed by ye little menn in ye white coats? (Feindish laffter here). That's right, I sent him oyne of my storys, and he couldn't standde the shock. Hee-Hee-Hee-hhaaaa-hoooo-hee-hee. Carl Schemmerling seems a bitte snobbish. Dave Ish (he's got a last name on the order of mine). With a name like TUNING, you have to be a musician, like I am, and with a name like Ish, you have to be a fan, like he is, and like I am too, or I wouldn't be writing you this, and what's more I'm running out of breath, so I better stop before I turn—purple—and—drop—dead.

Pant Pant. is always a card, an' I didde verily enjoy his bit of giggerish. Jesse Eller didn't have time to say anything. Martin Lewkowicz is a card too, and tho I don't agree with him on the storys he mentioned, I do agree with his "Nude, Lewd and CENSORED" policy. I do thinkke I shall try to correspond with himme. (come back Martin, you coward. Stoppe hiding behind your worple). Next

on the blacklist . . . oops, par'me, did I say blacklist? Gulp. Dick Ryan is a slob. Heh heh . . . He don't like Quandy. He is a wrong thinker. He should be liquidated. My pal Shelby Vick is one editor, and the other is Lee Hoffman (smack! drool!). Oh well, he's not beyond help. He likes PS. Dick Ryan, I mean.

Pardon me a mument. I don't like to write in ye Olde Eynghlish. I think I'll switch my time machyne back to the present. "# . . .

There.

Browsing on through the letters, I see one by that precousious little monster, Michael Wigodsky. What's he tryin' to do? prove he's an intellectual. It would be hard to prove he is even "Homo Sapien"! "Dear Chromium Cranium . . . Ah-ha-hee-hooooo-ha-ha-ha-hee— Dear Rickey Slavin, DROP DEAD! Whatin'll's wrong with La VIZI? It's the only place in prodrom where we can blow off steam in our own dear "asinine" way.

If this gets any longer, it shall never see publication as I fancy it never shall anyway, so I'll sign off, gibbering amiably in Martian as I goes, saying so very cleverly.

Byeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee,

WILD WILLIAM

Little Bill Tuning,
The Shiftless Solomon of Summerland.

P. S. Ken Scorso says to call your Nov. cover "a lurid blob of polychromatic rot. The editor won't like it, but what the CENSORED. Who gives a CENSORED. Not me, CENSORED no!!!" Ken is very scrupulous (snicker).

Ed's note—Fortunately not since the days of Childe "Kidd" Harold have we read any old English so anything Tuning said is strictly on him.

"NOTHING TO BRAG ABOUT"

930 Briardcliff Avenue,
Salt Lake City 16, Utah.

Dear Editor:

In this, my first letter to PLANET STORIES, I feel as if I'm entering a new door in the many-roomed castle of sciencefictiondom. Although not by any means a steady reader of PLANET, I have picked up a few copies here and there, up to the November issue—who knows? It may become a permanent habit. Why? I'm sure I don't know. PLANET is by no means one of the leading magazines in the field. It isn't getting better by the issue—in fact, many readers long for the "good old days" of PLANET. Its artists and stories aren't anything particular to brag about, either. Nevertheless, there's *something* about the magazine that keeps you coming back for more. What is this *something*?

I think that it's the feeling displayed in La VIZI-GRAPH. In La VIZI you can relax and enter more fully the ranks of STFandom. In the November issue, your statement: "Our purpose is to air as many views as space permits . . ." best explains this feeling. The letters found therein are not all pro-PLANET. In fact, sometimes, a lot of them are very uncomplimentary. I like this editorial principle of letting both pro and con views be aired, and not warp the readers column into some asinine editor-dictated PLANET-praising mockery.

Now that I have, for the present, disposed of my more refined views of PLANET, I will step more fully into the ranks of STFandom and comment on the November issue. The stories, as I've said, were only of fair calibre—ditto for the artwork. But,

anyone who has to have a deep, thought-provoking story everytime, has no place in fandom. Don't get me entirely wrong here, editor—I'm not running PLANET into the ground; I'm not saying it isn't worth reading; I'm not saying it isn't a good magazine; I just don't want to give you the idea I consider it the best in the S-F lot or express my undying devotion. For space opera; for S-F; for "strange adventures on other worlds," PLANET fits the bill. I like the magazine.

I suppose a rating of stories in each issue is helpful to the editor (if he follows them at all in picking out next month's line-up) so I'll give mine here. First we can list THE PIT OF NYMPHONS for the simple reason that the rest were as good as it was, but it was longer. Ditto for SWORDSMAN OF LOST TERRA—altho I have found that Anderson can do better if he wants to. If the short stories HALFTRIPPER and GRIM GREEN WORLD were the most "off-the-beaten-track" themes, but I found Russell's ILLUSIONARIES the best. Very good for a short story. Next in order was Walton's THE LAST LAUGH, followed by PALIMPSEST, WRECK OFF TRITON, and THE CONQUISTADORS COME with nothing particularly to recommend them except for the fact that the last story mentioned held a very sad theme. I felt pity for the poor creatures, and anger at man's unreasoning ignorance.

In the letters columns: first place goes to Lionel Meltzer for his frank (and possibly brutal) candid criticism of PLANET. It was truthful, clear and concise. He had humor in it without going "all out" as some fan do trying to be funny and failing miserably. I must argue with him, tho. It stands to reason that people from foreign planets and cultures will have different types of names. Witness this fact on Terra itself. I like Burroughs' type of names.

Second place is to Mr. Burwell for his stand on prejudices, and his comments on Sigler. Third to Mr. Dave Ish for his comments on the size of the so-called "novels" in PLANET. Long may these three fans continue to write to La VIZI if they can keep up letters like these.

Harold Hostetler: it's a lot more fun to be able to read all S-F stories and find them tops than it is to be able to distinguish "... between stories that were really appealing and ... run-of-the-mill STF." Drop me a line, Harold.

Carl Schemmerling: Waltari's THE EGYPTIAN is not "... equally fine and easily finer" than most STF in only mediocre mags. That novel is both trashy and presented in neither a factual manner nor as a good adventure theme. If this is a classical type novel give me hackneyed STF.

With this thought I close this long letter. I have tried to be helpful. I hope I have the opportunity to write again.

Sincerely yours,

GREGG CALKINS

THE FLEET SPEAKS FLEETLY

259 33 29 N DIV
USS R. B. Anderson DD786
c/o Fleet Post Office
San Francisco, Calif.

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No. 2 THE CONQUISTADORS COME—Very good.

PALIMPSEST No. 3—A type story I like.

HALFTRIPPER No. 4—Decent.

No. 5 THE LAST LAUGH—A good story with an excellent moral.

No. 6 THE ILLUSIONARIES—Poor. A bad ending. Fair reading till then.

WRECK OFF TRITON No. 7—Stinks.

I didn't even classify SWORDSMAN OF LOST TERRA. Good reading, but I don't believe it belongs in a SF mag. No comment on ILLOS.

Whatever the story I'm a confirmed reader.

Devoted Reader,

CARL SANDUSKY

LANOUE UP AT BAT

Hi, Dusty:

Today, after turning away from the workbench where yours truly has been producing Glug-Boxes and Rattle Bones under Government Contract, my sixty-legged slave, Klath, came walking in on his hands with the November PLANET clutched loosely in fifty-nine of his sixty feet.

Klath flipped the PLANET carelessly on the workbench, scattering parts of Rattle Bones here and there. After affectionately admonishing him by kicking him in the teeth with a steel-toed boot, I sat down on a needle, kicking a dusty Atomic bomb into the far corner where it exploded.

The explosion served to cauterise the copy of PLANET.

Going systematically—or nearly so—from cover to cover, we see—EEEEEEEEAAAAAH!

Das ist ein decke Ich danck welcher schult sein brennen! (Hokay! So I couldn't get by in der waterland. 'S been a long time since I ever had to use Deutsch.)

There are the usual proportions of inane ravings, semi-intelligent, and plain stupid letters in the VIZI-GRAPH. What about intelligent letters? Don't be silly. In the VIZIGRAPH?

Intelligently composed letters go to *Life*, *Post*, *Holiday*, *Atlantic Monthly*, and the other Elite magazines. To the VIZIGRAPH? Never.

Vilhelm Tuning says he never saw a sword with a round hilt. He says it as if a round-hilted sword would be an absurdity.

I have in my possession a sword with a 32-inch blade (Toledo). The hilt is most certainly ROUND and is wrapped with braided gold cord. It came from a Major of Luftwaffe. A round or elliptical hilt is much better than an angular hilt for several reasons. The best is, of course, the feel.

While I'm at the VIZIGRAPH, I might say that: Carl Schemmerling, Win. Michael Wigodsky, place.

A word about Wigodsky's letter. That piece was a drastic change from the ordinary patter included in the VIZIGRAPH. Wigodsky's letter was intelligently composed, and was a relief to read.

It seems that there is a mild argument, or discussion—take your pick—as to the defining of the word "art." Words are curious animals. "Art" is defined in Webster's, but "art" is a verrrrrry flexible word. Most people, on hearing the word "art" start looking for a painting or some works by a master of "fine arts."

Shooting down an opponent in ship-to-ship aerial combat is an art. (It really is. A fighter pilot—in the dark, dim past of the last two World Wars—had to have the steadiness of nerves of a God, the steadiness of hand of a fine painter). That sounds a little thick, perhaps.

But if you didn't have rock-like nerves and a steady hand, the Kraut in the Messerschmitt whipping in on you did. And if you didn't have nerves and a steady hand, you were dead.

Laying a gun is an art. Bricklaying is an art.

NEARLY EVERYTHING THAT REQUIRES SKILL IS "ART." Not necessarily, of course, "fine art," but ART just the same.

DON J. LANOUE

5028 N. Walnut, Spokane 16, Wash.

OVER 30 YEARS OF SUCH

Winston-Salem, N. C.

2221 Parkway Drive

Dear Editor: *

My compliments to you on the November issue of PLANET STORIES. This is the first issue that I have been able to get in quite some time, having been in the Orient for the past three years. I see by this issue that you are keeping up your standard both in regard to stories and artwork. The cover I like very much and the interior illos worked right in with the stories. I will not attempt to grade the stories because they were all good and the only fault that I find was in SWORDSMAN OF LOST TERRA, where the author made a mistake or two. I expect this sort of thing to happen at times and it doesn't detract from my enjoyment of the story as a whole, and I am pretty hard to please as I have been reading this sort of literature for over 30 years.

I am now assembling and collating material for a FANTASY CATALOG, which to my knowledge has never before been attempted. This catalog will be more than just a Check List with over 8,000 listings and other information. It is hoped that this book will be to fantasy and science-fiction fans what SCOTT'S CATALOG is to stamp collectors.

Sincerely,

ANDRE VON BELL

WHERE FROM HIM?

Dear Ro:

I've read my November issue of your and my mag—P. S. What I want to know is can everyone get in on the VIZIGRAPH or is it a family affair? There aren't too many *real* complaints this time either.

I read all the stories and they're good—most that is. The VIZIGRAPH? Here are my ingenuine reactions to this herd of letters. No. 1 in letters on the VIZI is—Henry W. Burwell, Jr., of Atlanta. No. 2 is Lionel Meltzer of Rockville Center, N. Y. No. 3 is Carl Schemmerling of Los Angeles. The trumpets can stop fan-faring now.

*Ze Storays!

1. SWORDSMAN OF LOST TERRA—Anderson. Excellent. Completely different pic of Nynysthans.

2. HALFTRIPPER—M. Reynolds. Bring him back. Brilliant imagination.

PALIMPSEST—R. Dee. Very good. But more or less usual.

GRIM GREEN WORLD—J. Starr. Good also. Rather short though, no suspense.

3. THE LAST LAUGH—B. Walton. Excellent. This has to be B. W.'s best.

THE ILLUSIONARIES—E. F. Russell. Run of the mill stuff—*Worse*. (FOO-OO-OOEY).

WRECK OFF TRITON—A. Coppel. He still around? Dull and uninteresting.

THE CONQUISTADORS COME—M. E. Counselman. No point to it—but good.

Ze VIZI—was very good this issue.

The cover picture stinks. The gun on the guy's hip looks as long as if he were holstering a rifle. The placing of the grenade isn't good either. Looks like it's above his elbow. And the broad being held up . . . Looks as if she doesn't belong there and is jumping off a jumping board.

Story Pictures: The picture for Poul Anderson's ingenious story is ingenious. It was marvelous. Tops. The picture for Dee's story was clever and somewhat eventful. The pic for Starr's story was very usual. Expected much better. Reynolds' story pic was imaginative. The pic for Bryce Walton's story was excellent. Well centered and explained. Good, quite good. (The story kept me motionless.) The PIT's pic was good—the opposite of the talents of S. Mullen. Wasted on Mr. Mullen (PEE-EE-UOO.)

Who is this guy Bradbury? He must be tops the way the readers yelp. Whoever he is, bring him back. I'd like to read him.

Another novel next issue by Poul Anderson, if you please. You can't go wrong, Mr. Robot, you can't. You're not human you know. Though after such stories as Russell and Coppel gave you I begin to wonder who is behind your tin head. Pardon me, no insult meant. No man, not after SWORDSMAN OF LOST TERRA. I can't stop praising it. The truth, the honest truth—so help me Saturn.

So-o-o I'll take off now in my cosmic tube. Be back for my next P.S. copy.

Guess what planet I came from——. No you jerk. Brooklyn, that's my planet.

IRVING M. SCHEIN

WHAT OF KILLORN?

134 Dawes Rd.,
Toronto, Ont.,

Dear Sir:

This is the first letter I've written you but I've been an ardent fan for quite some time. Your mag is of the best, and your worst is better than your competitors' best. (Well most of the time.)

#8. THE HALFTRIPPER—A take-off on the *Wandering Jew*??

#9. THE PIT OF NYMPHTHONS—Same old hero is criminal, saves girl, turns out to be framed, is pardoned.

#7. THE CONQUISTADORS COME—Cute and effective.

#6. ILLUSIONARIES—!!!!!!

#3. PALIMPSEST—Good, logical and possible.

#4. GRIM GREEN WORLD—Interesting and confusing.

#5. WRECK OFF TRITON—Poetic Justice plot.

#2. THE LAST LAUGH—Truer than you might think. Do we understand ourselves?

Your No. 1—SWORDSMAN OF LOST TERRA. Really good. Is Poul Anderson a newcomer or an old boy I've never heard of. (All right, put away the lead pipe. So I'm dumb). What does he mean by "The third book of THE STORY OF THE MEN OF KILLORN?" Is there more? If so bring it on.

Pics to H. W. Burwell (1); (2) Bill (slap-happy) Tuning; (3) Pvt. Roy R. Wood.

Bet you 5-1 you don't print this, Ed.

Yours for the first time,

KENNETH R. FROST

Ed's note—We take practically all 5-1 bets, as for Poul Anderson's reference to the "Third Book of the Story of the Men of Killorn" we suspect this is still underground. Anderson does little or no writing himself, he merely calls in the spirits of dead Norse with whom it is said he has some neat working arrangement.




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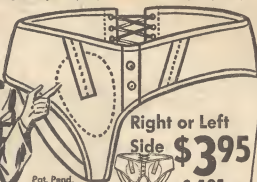
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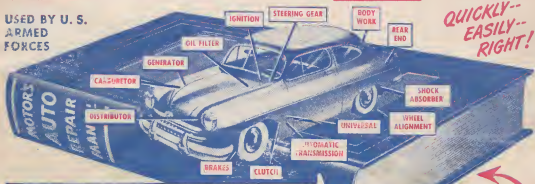
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